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THE D'ARTAGNAN ROMANCES.

THE VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE.

VOL. II.

HENRIETTA OF ENGLAND.

15-419

THE

VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE;

OR,

TEN YEARS LATER.

BY

ALEXANDRE DUMAS.

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THE

VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE.

CHAPTER I.

THE FIRST APPEARANCE OF COLBERT.

The whole night was passed in anguish, common to the dying man and the king: the dying man expected his deliverance; the king expected his liberty. Louis did not go to bed. An hour after leaving the chamber of the cardinal, he learned that the dying man, recovering a little strength, had insisted upon being dressed and painted, and seeing the ambassadors. Like Augustus, he no doubt considered the world to be a great theatre, and was desirous of playing out properly the last act of the comedy. Anne of Austria reappeared no more in the cardinal's apartments; she had nothing more to do there. Propriety was the pretext for her absence. On his part, the cardinal did not ask for her; the advice the queen had given her son rankled in his heart. Towards midnight, while he was still painted, Mazarin's mortal agony came on. He had revised his will; and as this will was the exact expression of his wishes, and as he feared that some interested influence might take advantage of his weakness to make him change something in that testament, he had given the watchword to Colbert, who walked up and down the corridor which led to the

cardinal's bed-chamber, like the most vigilant of sentinels. The king, shut up in his own apartment, despatched his nurse every hour to Mazarin's chamber, with orders to bring him exact intelligence of the cardinal's state. After having heard that Mazarin was dressed, painted, and had seen the ambassadors, Louis heard that prayers for the dying were begun for the cardinal. At one o'clock in the morning, Guénaud had administered the last remedy, called the heroic remedy. It was a survival of the old customs of that fencing-time, which was about to disappear to give place to another time, to believe that death could be kept off by some good secret thrust. Mazarin, after having taken the remedy, respired freely for nearly ten minutes. He immediately gave orders that the news should be spread everywhere of a fortunate crisis. The king, on learning this, felt a cold sweat passing over his brow. He had had a glimpse of the light of liberty; slavery appeared to him darker and less acceptable than ever. But the bulletin which followed entirely changed the face of things. Mazarin could no longer breathe at all, and could scarcely follow the prayers which the curé of St. Nicholas-des-Champs recited near him. The king resumed his agitated walk about his chamber, and consulted, as he walked, several papers drawn from a casket of which he alone had the key. A third time the nurse returned. M. de Mazarin had just uttered a joke, and had ordered his "Flora," by Titian, to be revarnished. At length, towards two o'clock in the morning, the king could no longer resist his weariness; he had not slept for twenty-four hours. Sleep, so powerful at his age, overcame him for about an hour. But he did not go to bed for that hour; he slept in a chair. About four o'clock his nurse awoke him by entering the room.

"Well?" asked the king.

"Well, my dear Sire," said the nurse, clasping her hands with an air of commiseration; "well, he is dead!"

The king arose at a bound, as if a steel spring had been applied to his legs. "Dead!" cried he.

"Alas! yes."

"Is it quite certain?"

"Yes."

"Official?"

"Yes."

"Has the news of it been made public?"

"Not yet."

"Who told you, then, that the cardinal was dead?"

"M. Colbert."

"M. Colbert?"

"Yes."

"And was he sure of what he said?"

"He came out of the chamber, and had held a glass for some minutes before the cardinal's lips."

"Ah!" said the king. "And what has become of M. Colbert?"

"He has just left the chamber of his Eminence."

"To go whither?"

"To follow me."

"So that he is —"

"There, my dear Sire, waiting at your door till it shall be your good pleasure to receive him."

Louis ran to the door, opened it himself, and perceived in the passage Colbert standing waiting. The king started at the sight of this statue, all clothed in black. Colbert, bowing with profound respect, advanced two steps towards his Majesty. Louis re-entered his chamber, making Colbert a sign to follow him. Colbert en-

tered. Louis dismissed the nurse, who closed the door as she went out. Colbert remained modestly standing near the door.

"What do you come to announce to me, Monsieur?" said Louis, very much troubled at being thus surprised in his private thoughts, which he could not completely conceal.

"That the cardinal has just expired, Sire; and that I bring your Majesty his last adieu."

The king remained pensive for a minute; and during that minute he looked attentively at Colbert. It was evident that the cardinal's last words were in his mind. "Are you, then, M. Colbert?" asked he.

"Yes, Sire."

"The faithful servant of his Eminence, as his Eminence himself told me?"

"Yes, Sire."

"The depositary of part of his secrets?"

"Of all of them."

"The friends and servants of his deceased Eminence will be dear to me, Monsieur, and I shall take care that you are placed in my offices."

Colbert bowed.

"You are a financier, Monsieur, I believe?"

"Yes, Sire"

"And did Monsieur the Cardinal employ you in his stewardship?"

"He did me that honor, Sire."

"You never did anything personally for my household, I believe?"

"Pardon me, Sire; it was I who had the honor of giving Monsieur the Cardinal the idea of an economy which puts three hundred thousand francs a year into your Majesty's coffers."

"What economy was that, Monsieur?" asked Louis XIV.

"Your Majesty knows that the hundred Swiss have silver lace on each side of their ribbons?"

"Doubtless."

"Well, Sire, it was I who proposed that false silver lace should be placed upon these ribbons; it could not be seen; and a hundred thousand crowns serve to feed a regiment for six months, or is the price of ten thousand good muskets, or is the value of a vessel of ten guns, ready for sea."

"That is true," said Louis XIV., considering the personage more attentively, "and really there is an economy well placed; besides, it was ridiculous for soldiers to wear the same lace as noblemen wear."

"I am happy to be approved by your Majesty."

"Is that the only appointment you held about the cardinal?" asked the king.

"It was I whom his Eminence appointed to examine the accounts of the superintendent, Sire."

"Ah!" said Louis, who was about to dismiss Colbert, but was arrested by that word, — "ah! it was you whom his Eminence had charged to audit the accounts of M. Fouquet, was it? And the result of the examination?"

"Is that there is a deficit, Sire; but if your Majesty will permit me —"

"Speak, M. Colbert."

"I ought to give your Majesty some explanations."

"Not at all, Monsieur; it is you who have audited these accounts. Give me the result."

"That is very easily done, Sire: empty everywhere, money nowhere."

"Take care, Monsieur! You are rudely attacking the administration of M. Fouquet, who nevertheless, I have heard say, is an able man."

Colbert colored, and then became pale; for he felt from that minute he entered upon a struggle with a man whose power almost equalled the power of him who had just died. "Yes, Sire, a very able man," repeated Colbert, bowing.

"But if M. Fouquet is an able man, and, in spite of that ability, if money be wanting, whose fault is it?"

"I do not accuse, Sire; I verify."

"That is well; make out your accounts, and present them to me. There is a deficit, do you say? A deficit may be temporary; credit returns, and funds are restored."

"No, Sire."

"Not this year, perhaps, I understand that; but next year?"

"Next year is eaten as bare as the current year."

"But the year after, then?"

"Like next year."

"What is this you tell me, M. Colbert?"

"I say there are four years pledged in advance."

"We must have a loan, then."

"We must have three, Sire."

"I will create offices to make them resign, and the money of the posts shall be paid into the treasury."

"Impossible, Sire; for there have already been creations upon creations of offices, the provisions of which are given in blank, so that the purchasers enjoy them without filling them. That is why your Majesty cannot make them resign. Further, upon each agreement the superintendent has made an abatement of a third, so that the people have been oppressed without your Majesty profiting by it."

The king started. "Explain that to me, M. Colbert."

"Let your Majesty state clearly your thought, and tell me what you wish me to explain."

"You are right; clearness is what you wish, is it not?"

"Yes, Sire, clearness. God is God, above all things because He made light."

"Well, for example," resumed Louis XIV., "if to-day, the cardinal being dead and I being king, I wanted money?"

"Your Majesty would not have any."

"Oh, that is strange, Monsieur! How! my superintendent could not find me any money?"

Colbert shook his great head.

"How is that?" said the king; "are the revenues of the State so much in debt that there are no longer any revenues?"

"Yes, Sire, to that extent."

The king frowned. "If it be so," said he, "I will get together the orders and obtain from the holders a discharge, a liquidation, at a cheap rate."

"Impossible; for the orders have been converted into bills, which bills, for the convenience of return and facility of transaction, are divided into so many parts that the originals can no longer be recognized."

Louis, very much agitated, walked about, still frowning. "But if this were as you say, M. Colbert," said he, stopping all at once, "I should be ruined before I began to reign."

"You are, in fact, Sire," said the impassive accountant.

"Well, but yet, Monsieur, the money is somewhere?"

"Yes, Sire; and even as a beginning, I bring your Majesty a note of funds which M. le Cardinal Mazarin was not willing to set down in his will, or in any act whatever, but which he confided to me."

"To you?"

"Yes, Sire, with an injunction to remit it to your Majesty."

"What! besides the forty millions of the will?"

"Yes, Sire."

"M. de Mazarin had still other funds?"

Colbert bowed.

"Why, that man was a gulf!" murmured the king. "M. de Mazarin on one side, M. Fouquet on the other, — more than a hundred millions, perhaps, between them! No wonder my coffers are empty!"

Colbert waited without stirring.

"And is the sum you bring me worth the trouble?" asked the king.

"Yes, Sire, it is a round sum."

"Amounting to how much?"

"To thirteen million livres, Sire."

"Thirteen millions!" cried Louis, trembling with joy, "do you say thirteen millions, M. Colbert?"

"I said thirteen millions; yes, your Majesty."

"Of which everybody is ignorant?"

"Of which everybody is ignorant."

"Which are in your hands?"

"In my hands; yes, Sire."

"And which I can have?"

"Within two hours."

"But where are they, then?"

"In the cellar of a house which the cardinal possessed in the city, and which he was so kind as to leave to me by a particular clause of his will."

"You are acquainted with the cardinal's will, then?"

"I have a duplicate of it, signed by his hand."

"A duplicate?"

"Yes, Sire; and here it is." Colbert quietly drew the deed from his pocket, and showed it to the king The king read the article relative to the donation of the house.

"But," said he, "there is no mention here but of the house; there is nothing said of the money."

"Your pardon, Sire; it is in my conscience."

"And M. de Mazarin has intrusted it to you?"

"Why not, Sire?"

"He! a man mistrustful of everybody!"

"He was not so of me, Sire, as your Majesty may perceive."

Louis fixed his eyes with admiration upon that vulgar but expressive face. "You are an honest man, M. Colbert," said the king.

"That is not a virtue, Sire; it is a duty," replied Colbert, coolly.

"But," added Louis, "does not the money belong to the family?"

"If this money belonged to the family, it would be disposed of in the cardinal's will, as the rest of his fortune is. If this money belonged to the family, I, who drew up the deed of gift in favor of your Majesty, should have added the sum of thirteen millions to that of forty millions which was offered to you."

"How!" exclaimed Louis XIV., "was it you who drew up the deed of gift, M. Colbert?"

"Yes, Sire."

"And yet the cardinal loved you?" added the king, artlessly.

"I had assured his Eminence that your Majesty would by no means accept the gift," said Colbert, in that same quiet manner we have described, and which, even in the common habits of life, had something solemn in it.

Louis passed his hand over his brow. "Oh, how young I am," murmured he, "to have the command of men!"

Colbert awaited the end of this soliloquy. He saw

Louis raise his head. "At what hour shall I send the money to your Majesty?" asked he.

"To-night, at eleven o'clock; I desire that no one may know that I possess this money."

Colbert made no more reply than if the thing had not been said to him.

"Is the amount in ingots or coined gold?"

"In coined gold, Sire."

"That is well."

"Whither shall I send it?"

"To the Louvre. Thank you, M. Colbert."

Colbert bowed and retired. "Thirteen millions!" exclaimed Louis, as soon as he was alone. "This must be a dream!" Then he let his head sink between his hands, as if he were really asleep. But in a moment he raised his head, shook out his beautiful locks, rose, and opening the window violently, bathed his burning brow in the keen morning air, which brought to his senses the fresh scent of the trees and the perfume of flowers. A splendid dawn was rising in the horizon, and the first rays of the sun inundated with flame the brow of the young king. "This dawn is that of my reign," murmured Louis XIV. "Is it a presage that you send me, all-powerful God?"

CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST DAY OF THE ROYALTY OF LOUIS XIV.

In the morning the news of the death of the cardinal was spread through the castle, and thence speedily reached the city. The ministers Fouquet, Lyonne, and Letellier entered the deliberative chamber to hold a council. The king summoned them immediately. "Messieurs," said he, "as long as Monsieur the Cardinal lived, I allowed him to govern my affairs; but now I mean to govern them myself. You will give me your advice when I shall ask it. You may go."

The ministers looked at one another with surprise. If they concealed a smile, it was with a great effort; for they knew that the prince, brought up in absolute ignorance of business, by this act of pride took upon himself a burden much too heavy for his strength. Fouquet took leave of his colleagues upon the stairs, saying, "Messieurs! there will be so much the less labor for us;" and he gayly mounted into his carriage. The others, a little uneasy at the turn events had taken, went back to Paris together.

About ten o'clock the king repaired to the apartment of his mother, with whom he had a strictly private conversation. Then, after dinner, he got into his carriage and went straight to the Louvre. There he received much company, and took a degree of pleasure in noticing the general hesitation and curiosity. Towards evening he ordered the doors of the Louvre to be closed, with the

exception of one only, — that which opened upon the quay. He placed on duty at this point two hundred Swiss, who did not speak a word of French, with orders to admit all who carried packages, but no others; and by no means to allow any one to go out. At eleven o'clock precisely, he heard the rolling of a heavy carriage under the arch, then of another, then of a third; after which the door grated upon its hinges in closing. Soon after, somebody scratched at the door of the cabinet. The king opened it himself, and beheld Colbert, whose first word was this: "The money is in your Majesty's cellar."

The king then descended and went himself to see the barrels of specie, in gold and silver, which, under the direction of Colbert, four men had just rolled into a cellar of which the king had given Colbert the key the same morning. This review completed, Louis returned to his apartments, followed by Colbert, who had not warmed his immovable coldness with the slightest exhibition of personal gratification.

"Monsieur," said the king, "what do you wish me to give you as a recompense for this devotion and integrity?"

"Absolutely nothing, Sire."

"How! nothing? Not even an opportunity of serving me?"

"If your Majesty were not to furnish me with that opportunity, I should not the less serve you. It is impossible for me not to be the best servant of the king."

"You shall be intendant of the finances, M. Colbert."

"But there is already a superintendent, Sire."

"I know that."

"Sire, the superintendent of the finances is the most powerful man in the kingdom."

"Ah!" cried Louis, coloring, "do you think so?"

"He will crush me in a week, Sire. Your Majesty offers me a comptrollership for which strength is indispensable. An intendant under a superintendent, — that is inferiority."

"You want support, — you do not reckon upon me?"

"I had the honor of telling your Majesty that during the lifetime of M. de Mazarin, M. Fouquet was the second man in the kingdom; now that M. de Mazarin is dead, M. Fouquet is become the first."

"Monsieur, I permit you to tell me everything to-day, but to-morrow please to remember I shall no longer suffer it."

"Then I shall be useless to your Majesty?"

"You are already, since you fear to compromise yourself in serving me."

"I only fear to be placed so that I cannot serve you."

"What do you wish, then?"

"I wish your Majesty to grant me assistance in the labors of the office of intendant."

"The post would lose in value?"

"It would gain in security."

"Choose your colleagues."

"Messieurs Breteuil, Marin, Hervard."

"To-morrow the order shall appear."

"Sire, I thank you."

"Is that all you ask?"

"No, Sire; one thing more."

"What is that?"

"Allow me to form a chamber of justice."

"What would this chamber of justice do?"

"Try the farmers-general and contractors who during ten years have peculated."

"Well, but what would you do with them?"

"Hang two or three, and that would make the rest disgorge."

"I cannot begin my reign with executions, M. Colbert."

"Change your policy, Sire, in order not to end with persecution." The king made no reply. "Does your Majesty consent?" said Colbert.

"I will reflect upon it, Monsieur."

"It will be too late, when reflection may be made."

"Why?"

"Because we have to deal with people stronger than ourselves, if they are warned."

"Form that chamber of justice, Monsieur."

"I will, Sire."

"Is that all?"

"No, Sire; there is still an important affair. What rights does your Majesty attach to this office of intendant?"

"Well — I do not know — the customary ones."

"Sire, I require that to this office be devolved the right of reading the correspondence with England."

"Impossible, Monsieur; for that correspondence is kept from the council. The cardinal himself carried it on."

"I thought your Majesty had this morning declared that there should no longer be a council?"

"Yes, I said so."

"Let your Majesty then have the goodness to read all the letters yourself, particularly those from England; I hold strongly to this point."

"Monsieur, you shall have that correspondence, and render me an account of it."

"Now, Sire, what shall I do with respect to the finances?"

"All which M. Fouquet does not do."

"That is all I ask of your Majesty. Thanks, Sire, I depart at ease;" and with these words he did depart.

Louis watched him as he went. Colbert was not yet a hundred paces from the Louvre, when the king received a courier from England. After having looked at and examined the envelope, the king broke the seal hastily, and found a letter from Charles II. The following is what the English prince wrote to his royal brother : —

"Your Majesty must be rendered very uneasy by the illness of Cardinal Mazarin ; but the excess of danger can only prove of service to you. The cardinal is given over by his physician. I thank you for the gracious reply you have made to my communication touching Lady Henrietta Stuart, my sister ; and in a week the Princess and her court will set out for Paris. It is gratifying to me to acknowledge the fraternal friendship you have evinced towards me, and to call you, more justly than ever, my brother. It is gratifying to me, above everything, to prove to your Majesty how much I am interested in all that may please you. You are having Belle-Isle-en-Mer secretly fortified. That is wrong. We shall never be at war against each other. That measure does not make me uneasy ; it makes me sad. You are spending useless millions there. Tell your ministers so ; and be assured that I am well informed. Render me the same service, my brother, if occasion offers."

The king rang his bell violently, and his *valet de chambre* appeared. "M. Colbert has just gone ; he cannot be far off. Let him be called back !" exclaimed he. The valet was about to execute the order, when the king stopped him. "No," said he, "no ; I see the whole scheme of that man. Belle-Isle belongs to M. Fouquet ; Belle-Isle is being fortified ; that is a conspiracy of M. Fouquet's. The discovery of that conspiracy is the ruin of the superintendent, and that discovery is the result of the correspondence with England. That is why Colbert wished to have that correspondence. Oh ! but I cannot place all my dependence upon that man. He is but the

head; I must have an arm." Louis all at once uttered a joyful cry. "I had," said he to the *valet de chambre*, "a lieutenant of Musketeers."

"Yes, Sire; M. d'Artagnan."

"He left the service for a time."

"Yes, Sire."

"Let him be found, and let him be here to-morrow at my levee."

The *valet de chambre* bowed and went out.

"Thirteen millions in my cellar," said the king, "Colbert bearing my purse, and D'Artagnan carrying my sword, — I am king!"

CHAPTER III.

A PASSION.

The day of his arrival, on returning from the Palais-Royal, Athos, as we have seen, went straight to his hotel in the Rue St. Honoré. He there found the Vicomte de Bragelonne waiting for him in his chamber, chatting with Grimaud. It was not an easy thing to talk with this old servant. Two men only possessed the secret, Athos and D'Artagnan. The first succeeded, because Grimaud sought to make him do the talking; D'Artagnan, on the contrary, because he knew how to make Grimaud talk. Raoul was occupied in making him describe the voyage to England; and Grimaud had related it in all its details, with a certain number of gestures, and eight words, neither more nor less. He had at first indicated, by an undulating movement of his hand, that his master and he had crossed the sea.

"Upon some expedition?" Raoul had asked.

Grimaud, by bending down his head, had answered, "Yes."

"When Monsieur the Count incurred much danger?" asked Raoul.

"Neither too much nor too little," Grimaud replied by a shrug of the shoulders.

"But, still, what sort of danger?" insisted Raoul.

Grimaud pointed to the sword; he pointed to the fire, and to a musket hung up over the wall.

"Monsieur the Count had an enemy over there, then?" cried Raoul.

"Monk," replied Grimaud.

"It is strange," continued Raoul, "that Monsieur the Count persists in regarding me as a novice, and not allowing me to share the honor and danger of his adventures."

Grimaud smiled. It was at this moment Athos came in. The landlord was lighting him up the stairs; and Grimaud, recognizing the step of his master, hastened to meet him, which cut short the conversation.

But Raoul was launched upon the sea of interrogatories, and did not stop. Taking both hands of the count, with warm but respectful tenderness, "How is it, Monsieur," said he, "that you started out upon a dangerous journey without bidding me adieu, without commanding the aid of my sword, — of myself, who ought to be your support, now that I have the strength, — of myself, whom you have brought up to be a man? Ah, Monsieur, why would you expose me to the cruel hazard of never seeing you again?"

"Who told you, Raoul, that my journey was a dangerous one?" replied the count, placing his cloak and hat in the hands of Grimaud, who had unbuckled his sword.

"I," said Grimaud.

"And why did you do so?" said Athos, sternly.

Grimaud was embarrassed. Raoul came to his assistance by answering for him: "It is natural, Monsieur, that our good Grimaud should tell me the truth in what concerns you. By whom should you be loved and supported, if not by me?"

Athos did not reply. He made a friendly motion to Grimaud, which sent him out of the room; he then seated himself in an armchair, while Raoul remained standing before him.

"But is it true," continued Raoul, "that your voyage was an expedition, and that fire and steel threatened you?"

"Say no more about that, Viscount," said Athos, mildly. "I set out hastily, it is true, but the service of King Charles II. required a prompt departure. As to your solicitude, I thank you for it, and I know that I can depend upon you. You have not wanted for anything, Viscount, in my absence, have you?"

"No, Monsieur, thank you."

"I left orders with Blaisois to pay you a hundred pistoles, if you should stand in need of money."

"Monsieur, I have not seen Blaisois."

"You have been without money, then?"

"Monsieur, I had thirty pistoles left from the sale of the horses I took in my last campaign, and Monsieur the Prince had the kindness to let me win two hundred pistoles at play with him three months ago."

"Do you play? I don't like that, Raoul."

"I never play, Monsieur; it was Monsieur the Prince who ordered me to hold his cards at Chantilly, — one night when a courier came to him from the king. I won the stakes, and Monsieur the Prince commanded me to keep them."

"Is that a practice in the household, Raoul?" asked Athos, with a frown.

"Yes, Monsieur; every week Monsieur the Prince affords, upon one occasion or another, a similar advantage to one of his gentlemen. There are fifty gentlemen in his Highness's household; it was my turn that time."

"Very well! You went into Spain, then?"

"Yes, Monsieur, I made a very delightful and interesting journey."

"You have been back a month, have you not?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"And in the course of that month what have you done?"

"My duties, Monsieur."

"Have you not been home to La Fère?"

Raoul colored. Athos looked at him calmly and fixedly.

"You would be wrong not to believe me," said Raoul. "I feel that I colored, and in spite of myself. The question you did me the honor to ask is of a nature to cause me much emotion. I color, then, because I am agitated, not because I meditate a falsehood."

"I know, Raoul, that you never lie."

"No, Monsieur."

"Besides, my young friend, you would be wrong; what I wanted to say — "

"I know quite well, Monsieur. You would ask me if I have not been to Blois?"

"Exactly so."

"I have not been there; I have not even seen the person of whom you would speak to me."

The voice of Raoul trembled as he pronounced these words. Athos, a sovereign judge in all matters of delicacy, immediately added, "Raoul, you answer as if distressed; you are unhappy."

"Very, Monsieur; you have forbidden me to go to Blois, or to see Mademoiselle de la Vallière again." Here the young man stopped. That dear name, so delightful to pronounce, made his heart bleed, although so sweet upon his lips.

"And I have acted rightly, Raoul," Athos hastened to reply. "I am neither an unjust nor a barbarous father. I respect true love; but I look forward for you to a future, — an immense future. A new reign is about to dawn brightly upon us; war calls upon a young king full of chivalric spirit. What is wanting to assist this heroic

ardor is a battalion of young and free lieutenants who would rush to the fight with enthusiasm, and fall crying, '*Vive le Roi!*' instead of 'Adieu, my dear wife!' You know what I mean, Raoul. However brutal my reasoning may appear to be, I conjure you, then, to believe me, and to turn away your thoughts from those early days of youth in which you took up this habit of love, — days of effeminate carelessness, which soften the heart and render it incapable of containing those strong, bitter draughts called glory and adversity. Therefore, Raoul, I repeat to you, you should see in my counsel only the desire of being useful to you, only the ambition of seeing you prosper. I believe you capable of becoming a remarkable man. March alone, and you will march better and more quickly."

"You have commanded, Monsieur," replied Raoul, "and I obey."

"Commanded!" cried Athos. "Is it thus you reply to me? I have commanded you! Oh! you distort my words as you misconceive my intentions. I did not command you; I entreated you."

"No, Monsieur, you have commanded," said Raoul, persistently. "But had you only entreated me, your entreaty is still more effective than your order. I have not seen Mademoiselle de la Vallière again."

"But you are unhappy, you are unhappy!" insisted Athos.

Raoul made no reply.

"I find you pale; I find you sad. The sentiment is strong, then?"

"It is a passion," replied Raoul.

"No; a habit."

"Monsieur, you know that I have travelled much, that I have passed two years far from her. Any habit would

be broken up by an absence of two years, I believe; whereas on my return I loved, not more, — that was impossible, — but as much. Mademoiselle de la Vallière is for me the mate above all others; but you are for me a god upon earth, — to you I sacrifice everything."

"You are wrong," said Athos; "I have no longer any right over you. Age has emancipated you; you no longer even stand in need of my consent. Besides, I will not refuse my consent after what you have told me. Marry Mademoiselle de la Vallière, if you like."

Raoul started; but suddenly, "You are too good, Monsieur," said he, "and your concession excites my warmest gratitude; but I will not accept it."

"Then you now refuse?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"I will not oppose you in anything, Raoul."

"But you have at the bottom of your heart an opinion against this marriage; you have not chosen it for me."

"That is true."

"That is sufficient to make me cease to persist; I will wait."

"Take care, Raoul! what you are now saying is serious."

"I know it is, Monsieur. As I said, I will wait."

"Until I die?" said Athos, much agitated.

"Oh, Monsieur," cried Raoul, with tears in his eyes, "is it possible that you should wound my heart thus? I have never given you cause of complaint!"

"Dear boy, that is true," murmured Athos, pressing his lips violently together to suppress the emotion of which he was no longer master. "No, I will no longer afflict you; only I do not comprehend what you mean by waiting. Will you wait till you love no longer?"

"Ah! for that! No, Monsieur; I will wait till you change your opinion."

"I should like to put the matter to a test, Raoul; I should like to see if Mademoiselle de la Vallière will wait as you do."

"I hope so, Monsieur."

"But take care, Raoul! if she did not wait? Ah! you are so young, so confiding, so loyal! Women are changeable."

"You have never spoken ill to me of women, Monsieur; you have never had to complain of them. Why should you doubt Mademoiselle de la Vallière?"

"That is true," said Athos, lowering his eyes. "I have never spoken ill to you of women; I have never had to complain of them. Mademoiselle de la Vallière never caused me a suspicion; but when we are looking forward, we consider exceptions, even improbabilities! *If*, I say, Mademoiselle de la Vallière should not wait for you?"

"How could that be, Monsieur?"

"If she turned her eyes another way?"

"If she looked favorably upon another man, — do you mean that, Monsieur?" said Raoul, pale with agony.

"Exactly."

"Well, Monsieur, I would kill that man," said Raoul, simply, "and all the men whom Mademoiselle de la Vallière should choose, until one of them had killed me, or Mademoiselle de la Vallière had restored me her heart."

Athos started. "I thought," resumed he, in a hollow voice, "that you called me just now your god, your law, in this world."

"Oh!" said Raoul, trembling, "you would forbid me the duel?"

"If I forbade it, Raoul?"

"You would forbid me to hope, Monsieur; consequently you would not forbid me to die."

Athos raised his eyes towards the viscount. He had pronounced these words with the most melancholy inflection, accompanied by the most melancholy look. "Enough," said Athos, after a long silence, "enough of this subject, upon which we both go too far. Live from day to day, Raoul; perform your duties, love Mademoiselle de la Vallière; in a word, act like a man, since you have attained the age of a man; only do not forget that I love you tenderly, and that you profess to love me."

"Ah, Monsieur the Count!" cried Raoul, pressing the hand of Athos to his heart.

"Enough, dear boy! leave me; I want rest. By the way, M. d'Artagnan has returned from England with me; you owe him a visit."

"I will go and pay it, Monsieur, with great pleasure; I love M. d'Artagnan exceedingly."

"You are right in doing so; he is a worthy man and a brave cavalier."

"Who loves you dearly," said Raoul.

"I am sure of that. Do you know his address?"

"At the Louvre, I suppose, at the Palais-Royal, or wherever the king is. Does he not command the Musketeers?"

"No; at present M. d'Artagnan is absent on leave; he is resting a little. Do not, therefore, seek him at the posts of his service. You will hear of him at the house of a certain Planchet."

"His former lackey?"

"Exactly; turned grocer."

"I know; Rue des Lombards?"

"Something like that, or Rue des Arcis."

"I will find it, Monsieur, — I will find it."

"You will say a thousand kind things to him for me, and invite him to dine with me before I set out for La Fère."

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Good-night, Raoul!"

"Monsieur, I see you wear an order I never saw you wear before; accept my compliments."

"The Fleece! — that is true. A plaything, my boy, which no longer amuses even an old child like myself. Good-night, Raoul."

CHAPTER IV.

D'ARTAGNAN'S LESSON.

RAOUL did not find D'Artagnan the next day, as he had hoped. He only met with Planchet, whose joy was great at seeing the young man again, and who contrived to pay him two or three little soldierly compliments, savoring very little of the grocer's shop. But as Raoul was returning from Vincennes the next day, at the head of fifty dragoons confided to him by the prince, he perceived, in the Place Baudoyer, a man with his nose in the air, examining a house, as we examine a horse we have a fancy to buy. This man, dressed in citizen costume buttoned up like a military doublet, a very small hat on his head, and a long shagreen-mounted sword by his side, turned his head as soon as he heard the step of the horses, and left off looking at the house to look at the dragoons. This was plainly M. d'Artagnan, — D'Artagnan on foot, D'Artagnan with his hands behind him, passing a little review upon the dragoons, after having reviewed the buildings. Not a man, not a tag, not a horse's hoof escaped his inspection.

Raoul rode at the side of his troop. D'Artagnan perceived him the last. "Eh!" said he, "eh! *mordioux!*"

"I was not mistaken!" cried Raoul, urging his horse towards him.

"Mistaken? No! Good-day to you," replied the ex-musketeer; while Raoul eagerly shook the hand of his old friend. "Take care, Raoul!" said D'Artagnan. "The

second horse of the fifth rank will lose a shoe before he gets to the Pont Marie; he has only two nails left in his off fore-foot."

"Wait a minute; I will come back," said Raoul.

"Can you leave your detachment?"

"The cornet is there to take my place."

"Then you will come and dine with me?"

"Most willingly, M. d'Artagnan."

"Be quick, then; leave your horse, or make them give me one."

"I prefer going back on foot with you."

Raoul hastened to give notice to the cornet, who took his place; he then dismounted, gave his horse to one of the dragoons, and with great delight seized the arm of M. d'Artagnan, who had watched him, during all these evolutions, with the satisfaction of a connoisseur.

"What! do you come from Vincennes?" said he, first of all.

"Yes, Monsieur the Chevalier."

"And the cardinal?"

"Is very ill; it is even reported he is dead."

"Are you on good terms with M. Fouquet?" asked D'Artagnan, with a disdainful movement of the shoulders, proving that the death of Mazarin did not affect him beyond measure.

"With M. Fouquet?" said Raoul; "I do not know him."

"So much the worse! so much the worse! for a new king always seeks to find tools."

"Oh! the king means no harm," replied the young man.

"I am not speaking about the crown," cried D'Artagnan, "but about the king. The king, — that is M. Fouquet, now that the cardinal is dead. You must contrive to stand well with M. Fouquet, if you do not wish to moulder away

all your life as I have mouldered. It is true you have, fortunately, other protectors."

"Monsieur the Prince, for instance."

"Worn out! worn out, my friend!"

"M. le Comte de la Fère."

"Athos! Oh! that's different; yes, Athos — and if you have any wish to make your way in England, you cannot apply to a better person. I can even say, without too much vanity, that I myself have some credit at the court of Charles II. There is a king, — God speed him!"

"Ah!" cried Raoul, with the artless curiosity of well-born young people while listening to experience and worth.

"Yes; a king who amuses himself, it is true, but who has had a sword in his hand, and can appreciate useful men. Athos is on good terms with Charles II. Take service there, and leave these scoundrels of contractors and farmers-general, who steal as well with French hands as others have stolen with Italian hands; leave the little snivelling king, who is going to give us another reign of Francis II. Do you know anything of history, Raoul?"

"Yes, Monsieur the Chevalier."

"Do you know, then, that Francis II. always had the earache?"

"No, I did not know that."

"That Charles IV. always had the headache?"

"Indeed!"

"And Henry III. always the stomach-ache?"

Raoul began to laugh.

"Well, my dear friend, Louis XIV. always has the heart-ache. It is deplorable to see a king sighing from morning till night, without saying once in the course of the day, '*Ventre-saint-gris!*' '*Corbœuf!*' or anything to rouse one."

"Was that the reason why you left the service, Monsieur the Chevalier?"

"Yes."

"But you yourself, M. d'Artagnan, are throwing the handle after the hatchet; you will never make your fortune."

"Who? I?" replied D'Artagnan, in a careless tone. "I am settled; I had some family property."

Raoul looked at him. The poverty of D'Artagnan was proverbial. A Gascon, he exceeded in ill-luck all the gasconnades of France and Navarre; Raoul had a hundred times heard Job and D'Artagnan mentioned together, like the twins Romulus and Remus. D'Artagnan caught Raoul's look of astonishment.

"And has not your father told you I have been in England?"

"Yes, Monsieur the Chevalier."

"And that I had there met with a very lucky chance?"

"No, Monsieur, I did not know that."

"Yes; a very worthy friend of mine, a great nobleman, the Viceroy of Scotland and Ireland, has endowed me with an inheritance."

"An inheritance?"

"And a good one too."

"Then you are rich! Receive my sincere congratulation."

"Thank you! Look! that is my house."

"Place de Grève?"

"Yes; you don't like this quarter?"

"Quite the contrary; the look-out on the water is pleasant. Oh, what a pretty old house!"

"The sign of Notre Dame; it is an old pot-house which I have transformed into a private house in two days."

"But the pot-house is still open?"

"Yes."

"And where do you lodge, then?"

"I? I lodge with Planchet."

"You said just now, 'There is my house.'"

"I said so, because, in fact, it is my house. I have bought it."

"Ah!" said Raoul.

"At ten years' purchase, my dear Raoul; a superb affair. I bought the house for thirty thousand livres. It has a garden which opens to the Rue de la Mortillerie; the pot-house lets for a thousand livres, together with the first story; the garret, or second floor, for five hundred livres."

"Five hundred livres for a garret? Why, that is not habitable."

"Therefore no one does inhabit it; only, you see this garret has two windows which look out upon the Place."

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Well, then, every time anybody is broken on the wheel, or hung, quartered, or burnt, those two windows are let for as high as twenty pistoles."

"Oh!" said Raoul, with horror.

"It is disgusting, is it not?" said D'Artagnan. "It is disgusting, but so it is. These Parisian loungers are sometimes real anthropophagi. I cannot conceive how men, Christians, can enjoy such spectacles.

"That is true."

"As for myself," continued D'Artagnan, "if I inhabited that house, I would shut it up to the very keyholes on days of execution; but I do not inhabit it."

"And you let the garret for five hundred livres?"

"To the ferocious innkeeper, who sub-lets it. I said, then, fifteen hundred livres."

"The natural interest of money," said Raoul, "at five per cent."

"Exactly so. I then have left the body of the house at the back, — shops, lodgings, and cellars, inundated every winter, — two hundred livres; and the garden, which is very fine, well planted, well shaded under the walls and the portal of St. Gervais and St. Protais, thirteen hundred livres."

"Thirteen hundred livres! why, that is royal!"

"This is the history of it. I strongly suspect some canon of the parish, — these canons are all as rich as Crœsus, — I suspect some canon of having hired the garden to take his pleasure in. The tenant has given the name of M. Godard. That is either a false name or a real name: if true, he is a canon; if false, he is some unknown. But of what consequence is it to me? He always pays in advance. I had also an idea just now, when I met you, of buying a house in the Place Baudoyer, the back premises of which join my garden, and would make a magnificent property. Your dragoons interrupted my calculations. But come, let us take the Rue de la Vannerie; that will lead us straight to Master Planchet's."

D'Artagnan mended his pace, and conducted Raoul to Planchet's dwelling, a chamber of which the grocer had given up to his old master. Planchet was out, but the dinner was ready. There was a remnant of military regularity and punctuality preserved in the grocer's household. D'Artagnan returned to the subject of Raoul's future.

"Your father keeps you rather strictly?" said he.

"Justly, Monsieur the Chevalier."

"Oh, yes, I know Athos is just; but close, perhaps?"

"A royal hand, M. d'Artagnan."

"Well, never want, my boy! If ever you stand in need of a few pistoles, the old musketeer is at hand."

"My dear M. d'Artagnan!"

"Do you play a little?"

"Never."

"Successful with the ladies, then? You blush. Oh, my little Aramis! That, my dear friend, costs still more than play. It is true we fight when we lose; that is a compensation. Bah! the little sniveller of a king makes men who win pay the penalty for it. What a reign! my poor Raoul, what a reign! When I think that in my time the Musketeers were besieged in their houses, like Hector and Priam in the city of Troy; and then the women wept, and then the walls laughed, and then five hundred beggarly fellows clapped their hands, and cried, 'Kill! kill!' when not one musketeer was hurt! *Mordioux!* you will never see anything like that."

"You are very hard upon the king, my dear M. d'Artagnan; and yet you scarcely know him."

"I! Listen, Raoul. Day by day, hour by hour, — take note of my words, — I will predict what he will do. The cardinal being dead, he will weep: very well, that is the least silly thing he will do, particularly if he does not shed a tear."

"And then?"

"Why, then he will get M. Fouquet to allow him a pension, and will go and compose verses at Fontainebleau upon some Mancini or other, whose eyes the queen will scratch out. She is a Spaniard, you see, this queen of ours; and she has, as a mother-in-law, Madame Anne of Austria. I know something of the Spaniards of the house of Austria."

"And next?"

"Well, after having torn off the silver tags from the uniforms of his Swiss, because embroidery is too expensive, he will dismount the Musketeers, because the oats and hay of a horse cost five sols a day."

"Oh! do not say that."

"Of what consequence is it to me? I am no longer a musketeer, am I? Let them be on horseback; let them be on foot; let them carry a larding-needle, a spit, a sword, or nothing, — what is it to me?"

"My dear M. d'Artagnan, I beseech you, say no more ill to me of the king. I am almost in his service, and my father would be very angry with me for having heard even from your mouth words offensive to his Majesty."

"Your father, eh! He is a knight in every bad cause. Yes, your father is a brave man, — is a Cæsar, in fact, — but a man without perception."

"Now, my dear Chevalier," exclaimed Raoul, laughing, "you are going to speak ill of my father, of him you call the great Athos. You are in a wicked vein to-day; riches make you as sour as poverty makes other people."

"*Pardieu!* you are right. I am a rascal and in my dotage; I am an unhappy wretch grown old, — a forage-cord untwisted, a pierced cuirass, a boot without a sole, a spur without a rowel; but do me the pleasure to say one thing for me."

"What is that, my dear M. d'Artagnan?"

"Say this to me: 'Mazarin was a pitiful wretch.'"

"Perhaps he is dead."

"More the reason, — I say *was;* if I did not hope that he was dead, I would entreat you to say, 'Mazarin *is* a pitiful wretch.' Come say so, say so, for the love of me."

"Well, I will."

"Say it!"

"Mazarin was a pitiful wretch," said Raoul, smiling at the musketeer, who roared with laughter as in his best days.

"A moment!" said the latter. "You have spoken my first proposition; here is the conclusion. Repeat, Raoul, repeat: 'But I should feel regret for Mazarin.'"

"Chevalier!"

"You will not say it? Well, then, I will say it twice for you: 'But you would feel regret for Mazarin.'"

And they were still laughing and discussing this drafting a profession of principles, when one of the grocer's boys entered. "A letter, Monsieur, said he, "for M. d'Artagnan."

"Thank you; give it me," cried the musketeer.

"The handwriting of Monsieur the Count," said Raoul.

"Yes, yes;" and D'Artagnan broke the seal. It was from Athos.

"DEAR FRIEND, — A person has just been here to beg me to seek for you by the wish of the king."

"Seek me!" said D'Artagnan, letting the paper fall upon the table. Raoul picked it up, and continued to read aloud.

"Make haste. His Majesty is very anxious to speak to you, and expects you at the Louvre."

"Expects me!" again repeated the musketeer.

"He! he!" laughed Raoul.

"Oh, oh!" replied D'Artagnan. "What the devil can this mean?"

CHAPTER V.

THE KING.

The first feeling of surprise over, D'Artagnan re-perused Athos' note. "It is strange," said he, "that the king should send for me."

"Why so?" said Raoul; "do you not think, Monsieur, that the king must wish such a servant as you back again?"

"Oh!" exclaimed the officer, laughing with all his might; "you are flattering me, Master Raoul. If the king had wanted me he would not have let me leave him. No, no; I see in it something better, or worse, if you like."

"Worse! What can that be, Monsieur the Chevalier?"

"You are young, you are sanguine, you are admirable. Oh, how I should like to be as you are! To be but twenty-four, with an unfurrowed brow, under which the brain is void of everything but woman, love, and good intentions! Oh, Raoul, as long as you have not received the smile of kings and the confidence of queens; as long as you have not had two cardinals killed under you, the one a tiger, the other a fox; as long as you have not — But what is the good of all this trifling? We must part, Raoul."

"With what a serious face you say that!"

"Ah! but the occasion is worthy of it. Listen to me! I have a very good recommendation to make you."

"I am all attention, M. d'Artagnan."

"You will go and inform your father of my departure."

"Your departure?"

"*Pardieu!* You will tell him that I have gone to England, and that I am living in my little country-house."

"To England, you! — And the king's orders?"

"You get more and more silly; do you imagine that I am going in that way to the Louvre, to place myself at the disposal of that little crowned wolf-cub?"

"The king a wolf-cub? Why, Monsieur the Chevalier, you are mad!"

"On the contrary, I was never so much otherwise. You do not know what he wants to do with me, this worthy son of Louis the Just. But, *mordioux!* that is policy. He wishes to ensconce me snugly in the Bastille, purely and simply; don't you see?"

"What for?" cried Raoul, terrified at what he heard.

"On account of what I told him one day at Blois. I was heated; he remembers it."

"You told him what?"

"That he was mean, cowardly, and silly."

"Good God!" cried Raoul, "is it possible that such words should have issued from your mouth?"

"Perhaps I don't give the letter of my discourse, but I give the sense of it."

"But did not the king have you arrested immediately?"

"By whom? It was I who commanded the Musketeers; he must have commanded me to convey myself to prison. I would never have consented; I would have resisted myself. And then I went into England — no more D'Artagnan. Now, the cardinal is dead, or nearly so; they learn that I am in Paris, and they lay their hands on me."

"The cardinal was, then, your protector?"

"The cardinal knew me; he knew certain peculiarities of mine. I also knew certain of his: we entertained for each other a mutual appreciation. And then, on surrendering his soul to the devil, he would recommend Anne of Austria to put me in a safe place. Go, then, and find your father; relate the fact to him, — and adieu!"

"My dear M. d'Artagnan," said Raoul, very much agitated, after having looked out of the window, "you cannot escape!"

"Why not?"

"Because there is below an officer of the Swiss Guards waiting for you."

"Well!"

"Well, he will arrest you."

D'Artagnan broke into an Homeric laugh.

"Oh! I know very well that you will resist, that you will fight even; I know very well that you will come off victor. But that amounts to rebellion; and you are an officer yourself, knowing what discipline is."

"Devil of a boy! how noble, how logical, that is!" grumbled D'Artagnan.

"You agree with me, don't you?"

"Yes. Instead of passing into the street, where that oaf is waiting for me, I will slip quietly out at the back. I have a horse in the stable, and a good one. I will ride him to death, — my means permit me to do so, — and by killing one horse after another, I shall arrive at Boulogne in eleven hours; I know the road. Tell your father only one thing."

"What is that?"

"This, — that what he knows about is at Planchet's house, except a fifth; and that —"

"But, my dear M. d'Artagnan, take care! If you run away, two things will be said of you."

"What are they, my dear friend?"

"The first, that you were afraid."

"Ah! and who will dare to say that?"

"The king, first of all."

"Well! but — he will tell the truth. I am afraid."

"The second, that you felt yourself guilty."

"Guilty of what?"

"Why, of the crimes they wish to impute to you."

"That is true again. So, then, you advise me to go and get myself put in the Bastille?"

"M. le Comte de la Fère would advise you just as I do."

"*Pardieu!* I know he would," said D'Artagnan, thoughtfully. "You are right. I shall not escape. But if they cast me into the Bastille?"

"We will get you out again," said Raoul, with a calm and quiet air.

"*Mordioux!* You said that after a brave fashion, Raoul," said D'Artagnan, seizing his hand; "that savors of Athos, truly. Well, I will go, then. Do not forget my last word."

"Except a fifth," said Raoul.

"Yes; you are a fine boy, and I want you to add one thing to that last word."

"Speak, Chevalier!"

"It is that if you cannot get me out of the Bastille, and I die there, — oh! that is a matter of course, and I shall be a detestable prisoner; I, who have been a passable man, — in that case, I give three fifths to you, and the fourth to your father."

"Chevalier!"

"If you want to have some masses said for me, you are welcome."

When he had done speaking, D'Artagnan took down his belt from the hook, girded on his sword, took a hat

with a fresh feather, and held his hand out to Raoul, who threw himself into his arms. When in the shop, he cast a quick glance at the shop-lads, who looked upon the scene with a pride mingled with some uneasiness; then plunging his hand into a box of dried currants, he went straight to the officer who was philosophically waiting for him at the door of the shop.

"Those features! Can it be you, M. de Friedisch?" cried the musketeer, gayly. "Eh! eh! what! do we arrest our friends?"

"Arrest!" whispered the lads among themselves.

"Yes, it be I, M. d'Artagnan! Goot-tay to you!" said the Swiss.

"Must I give you up my sword? I warn you that it is long and heavy; you had better let me wear it to the Louvre. I feel quite lost in the streets without a sword, and you would be more at a loss than I should, with two."

"The king has gifen no orders apout it," replied the Swiss; "so keep your sword."

"Well, that is very polite on the part of the king. Let us go, at once."

M. de Friedisch was not a talker, and D'Artagnan had too much to think of to talk. From Planchet's shop to the Louvre was not far, — they arrived in ten minutes. It was night. M. de Friedisch wanted to enter by the wicket. "No," said D'Artagnan, "you would lose time by that; take the little staircase."

The Swiss did as D'Artagnan advised, and conducted him to the vestibule of the king's cabinet. When arrived there, he bowed to his prisoner, and without saying anything, returned to his post.

D'Artagnan had not had time to ask why his sword was not taken from him, when the door of the cabinet opened, and a *valet de chambre* called, "M. d'Artagnan!"

The musketeer assumed his parade carriage, and entered, with his eyes wide open, his brow calm, his mustache stiff. The king was seated at a table writing. He did not disturb himself when the step of the musketeer resounded on the floor; he did not even turn his head. D'Artagnan advanced as far as the middle of the room, and seeing that the king paid no attention to him, and suspecting, besides, that that was nothing but affectation, a sort of tormenting preamble to what was coming, he turned his back on the king, and began to examine minutely the frescos on the cornices, and the cracks in the ceiling. This manœuvre was accompanied by this silent little monologue: "Ah! you want to humble me, do you? — you, whom I have seen so young, — you, whom I have saved as I would my own child, — you, whom I have served as I would my God, — that is to say, for nothing. Wait awhile! wait awhile! you shall see what a man can do who has snuffed the fire of the Huguenots, under the beard of the cardinal, — the true cardinal!"

At this moment Louis turned round. "Ah! are you there, M. d'Artagnan?" said he.

D'Artagnan saw the movement, and imitated it. "Yes, Sire," said he.

"Very well; have the goodness to wait till I have added this up."

D'Artagnan made no reply; he only bowed. "That is polite enough," thought he; "I have nothing to say."

Louis made a violent dash with his pen, and threw it angrily away.

"Go on, — work yourself up!" thought the musketeer; "you will put me at my ease. You shall find I did not empty the bag the other day at Blois!"

Louis rose from his seat, passed his hand over his

brow; then, stopping opposite D'Artagnan, he looked at him with an air at once imperious and kind.

"What does he want with me? I wish he would get through with it," thought the musketeer.

"Monsieur," said the king, "you know, without doubt, that the cardinal is dead?"

"I suspected so, Sire."

"You know that, consequently, I am master in my own kingdom?"

"That is not a thing that dates from the death of the cardinal, Sire; a man is always master in his own house, when he wishes to be so."

"Yes; but do you remember all you said to me at Blois?"

"Now we are coming to it," thought D'Artagnan; "I was not deceived. Well, so much the better; it is a sign that my scent is tolerably keen yet."

"You do not answer me," said Louis.

"Sire, I think I recollect."

"You only think?"

"It is so long ago."

"If you do not remember, I do. This is what you said to me; listen with attention."

"Oh, I shall listen with all my ears, Sire; for it is very likely the conversation will turn in a fashion very interesting to me."

Louis once more looked at the musketeer. The latter smoothed the feather of his hat, then his mustache, and waited intrepidly. Louis XIV. continued: "You quitted my service, Monsieur, after having told me the whole truth?"

"Yes, Sire."

"That is, after having declared to me all you thought was true with regard to my mode of thinking and acting.

That is always a merit. You began by telling me that you had served my family thirty-four years, and were tired."

"I said so; yes, Sire."

"And you afterwards admitted that that fatigue was a pretext, and that discontent was the real cause."

"I was discontented, it is true, but that discontent has never betrayed itself that I know of; and if, like a man of heart, I have spoken out before your Majesty, I have not even thought of the matter in the presence of anybody else."

"Do not excuse yourself, D'Artagnan, but continue to listen to me. When reproaching me with the fact that you were discontented, you received in reply a promise. I said, 'Wait;' is not that true?"

"Yes, Sire, as true as what I told you."

"You answered me, 'Hereafter? No; now, immediately.' Do not excuse yourself, I tell you. It was natural; but you had no charity for your poor prince, M. d'Artagnan."

"Sire, charity for a king on the part of a poor soldier!"

"You understand me very well. You know that I stood in need of it; you know very well that I was not master; you know very well that my hope was in the future. Now, you replied to me when I spoke of that future, 'My discharge, and that directly!'"

"That is true," murmured D'Artagnan, biting his mustache.

"You did not flatter me when I was in distress," added Louis.

"But," said D'Artagnan, raising his head nobly, "if I did not flatter your Majesty when poor, neither did I betray you. I have shed my blood for nothing; I have watched like a dog at a door, knowing full well that

neither bread nor bone would be thrown to me. I, although poor likewise, asked nothing of your Majesty but the discharge you speak of."

"I know you are a brave man; but I was a young man, and you ought to have treated me with some consideration. What had you to reproach the king with, — that he left King Charles II. without succor? Let us speak further, — that he did not marry Mademoiselle de Mancini?" As he said these words, the king fixed upon the musketeer a searching look.

"Ah!" thought the latter, "he is doing more than remembering; he is interpreting. The devil!"

"Your judgment," continued Louis, "fell upon the king and fell upon the man. But, M. d'Artagnan, that weakness, — for you considered it a weakness?" D'Artagnan made no reply. "You reproached me also with regard to the now deceased cardinal. Now, did not the cardinal bring me up, did he not support me? — elevating himself and supporting himself at the same time, I admit; but the benefit was discharged. Had I been an ingrate, an egotist, would you, then, have better loved me or served me?"

"Sire!"

"We will say no more about it, Monsieur; it would only cause you too many regrets, and me too much pain."

D'Artagnan was not convinced. The young king, in adopting a tone of hauteur with him, did not advance his purpose.

"You have since reflected?" resumed Louis.

"Upon what, Sire?" asked D'Artagnan, politely.

"Why, upon all that I have said to you, Monsieur."

"Yes, Sire, no doubt —"

"And you have only waited for an opportunity of retracting your words?"

"Sire!"

"You hesitate, it seems."

"I do not understand what your Majesty did me the honor to say to me?" Louis's brow became cloudy. "Have the goodness to excuse me, Sire. My understanding is particularly thick; things do not penetrate it without difficulty; but it is true that when once they get in, they remain there."

"Yes, you appear to have a memory."

"Almost as good as your Majesty's."

"Then give me quickly an explanation. My time is valuable. What have you been doing since your discharge?"

"Making my fortune, Sire."

"The expression is rude, M. d'Artagnan."

"Your Majesty takes it in bad part, certainly. I entertain nothing but the profoundest respect for the king; and if I have been impolite, which might be excused by my long sojourn in camps and barracks, your Majesty is too much above me to be offended at a word innocently spoken by a soldier."

"In fact, I know that you have done a brilliant deed in England, Monsieur. I only regret that you have broken your promise."

"I!" cried D'Artagnan.

"Certainly. You pledged your word not to serve any other prince on quitting my service. Now, it was for King Charles II. that you undertook the marvellous carrying off of M. Monk."

"Pardon me, Sire; it was for myself."

"And was it a success for you?"

"As exploits and adventures were to the captains of the fifteenth century."

"What do you call succeeding? — a fortune?"

"A hundred thousand crowns, Sire, which I possess, — that is, in one week, three times as much money as I ever had in fifty years."

"It is a handsome sum. But you are ambitious, I believe?"

"I, Sire? The quarter of it would be a treasure, and I swear to you I have no thought of augmenting it."

"What! do you contemplate remaining idle?"

"Yes, Sire."

"To relinquish the sword?"

"I have already done that."

"Impossible, M. d'Artagnan!" said Louis, firmly.

"But, Sire —"

"Well?"

"Why not?"

"Because I will that you shall not!" said the young prince, in a voice so stern and imperious that D'Artagnan evinced surprise and even uneasiness.

"Will your Majesty allow me one word of reply?" he asked.

"Speak."

"I formed that resolution when I was poor and destitute."

"So be it! Go on."

"Now, when by my industry I have acquired a comfortable means of subsistence, would your Majesty despoil me of my liberty? Your Majesty would condemn me to the least, when I have gained the most."

"Who gave you permission, Monsieur, to fathom my designs, or to reckon with me?" replied Louis, in a voice almost angry. "Who told you what I shall do, or what you will yourself do?"

"Sire," said the musketeer, quietly, "so far as I see, freedom is not in order in this conversation, as I believe

it was on the day that we came to an explanation at Blois."

"No, Monsieur; everything is changed."

"I render your Majesty my sincere congratulations, but —"

"But you don't believe it?"

"I am not a great statesman, and yet I have my eye upon affairs; it seldom fails. Now, I do not see exactly as your Majesty does, Sire. The reign of Mazarin is over, but that of the financiers has begun. They have the money; your Majesty will not often see much of it. To live under the paw of those hungry wolves is hard for a man who reckoned upon independence."

At this moment some one scratched at the door of the cabinet. The king raised his head proudly. "Your pardon, M. d'Artagnan," said he; "it is M. Colbert, who comes to make me a report. Come in, M. Colbert!"

D'Artagnan drew back. Colbert entered, his papers in his hand, and went up to the king. You may believe that the Gascon did not lose the opportunity of applying his keen, quick glance to the new figure which presented itself.

"Is the inquiry finished, then?" asked the king of Colbert.

"Yes, Sire."

"And the opinion of the inquisitors?"

"Is that the accused merit confiscation and death."

"Ah!" said the king, without changing countenance, and casting a glance at D'Artagnan. "And your own opinion, M. Colbert?" said he.

Colbert looked at D'Artagnan in his turn. That imposing countenance checked the words upon his lips. Louis perceived this. "Do not be disturbed," said he; "it is M. d'Artagnan. Do you not recognize M. d'Artagnan?"

These two men looked at each other, — D'Artagnan with his eyes open and bright, Colbert with his eyes half-closed and dim. The frank intrepidity of the one displeased the other; the cautious circumspection of the financier displeased the soldier.

"Ah! this is the gentleman who made that brilliant stroke in England," said Colbert; and he bowed slightly to D'Artagnan.

"Ah!" said the Gascon, "this is the gentleman who clipped off the silver lace from the uniform of the Swiss. A praiseworthy piece of economy!" and he bowed profoundly.

The financier thought to embarrass the musketeer; but the musketeer ran the financier right through.

"M. d'Artagnan," resumed the king, who had not remarked all these shades of meaning, of which Mazarin would not have missed one, "this concerns the farmers of the revenue who have robbed me, whom I am hanging, and whose death-warrants I am about to sign."

"Oh! oh!" said D'Artagnan, starting.

"What did you say?"

"Oh, nothing, Sire! this is no business of mine."

The king had already taken up the pen, and was applying it to the paper.

"Sire," said Colbert, in a low voice, "I beg to warn your Majesty that if an example be necessary, that example may present some difficulty in its execution."

"You are saying —" said Louis.

"You must not conceal from yourself," continued Colbert, quietly, "that attacking the farmers-general is attacking the superintendence. The two unfortunate guilty men in question are the particular friends of a powerful personage; and on the day of the punishment, which otherwise might be hushed up in the *châtelet*, disturbances will arise without doubt."

Louis colored and turned towards D'Artagnan, who was calmly gnawing his mustache, not without a smile of pity for the financier, as likewise for the king, who had to listen to him so long. But Louis seized the pen, and with a movement so rapid that his hand shook, affixed his signature at the bottom of the two papers presented by Colbert; then, looking the latter in the face, "M. Colbert," said he, "when you speak to me of affairs, exclude, in general, the word 'difficulty' from your reasonings and opinions; as to the word 'impossibility,' never pronounce it."

Colbert bowed, much humiliated at having undergone such a lesson before the musketeer. He was about to go out; but, anxious to make up for his rebuff, "I forgot to announce to your Majesty," said he, "that the confiscations amount to the sum of five million livres."

"That 's pretty," thought D'Artagnan.

"Which makes in my coffers —" said the king.

"Eighteen million livres, Sire," replied Colbert, bowing.

"*Mordioux!*" grumbled D'Artagnan, "that 's fine!"

"M. Colbert," added the king, "you will, if you please, go through the gallery where M. de Lyonne is waiting, and will tell him to bring hither what he has drawn up — by my order."

"Directly, Sire; if your Majesty wants me no more this evening?"

"No, Monsieur; adieu!" and Colbert went out.

"Now let us return to our affair, M. d'Artagnan," resumed the king, as if nothing had happened. "You see that with respect to money there is already a notable change."

"Something like from zero to eighteen millions," replied the musketeer, gayly. "Ah! that was what your Majesty wanted the day King Charles II. came to Blois.

The two States would not have been embroiled to-day; for I must say that there also I see a stumbling-block."

"Well, in the first place," retorted Louis, "you are unjust, Monsieur; for if Providence had permitted me to give my brother the million that day, you would not have quitted my service, and consequently you would not have made your fortune, as you told me just now you have done. But in addition to this, I have had another piece of good fortune; and my difference with Great Britain need not alarm you."

A *valet de chambre* interrupted the king by announcing M. de Lyonne. "Come in, Monsieur," said the king; "you are punctual; that is like a good servant. Let us see your letter to my brother Charles II."

D'Artagnan pricked up his ears. "A moment, Monsieur!" said Louis, carelessly, to the Gascon; "I must despatch to London my consent to the marriage of my brother, M. le Duc d'Anjou, with the Princess Henrietta Stuart."

"He is drubbing me, it seems," murmured D'Artagnan, while the king signed the letter, and dismissed M. de Lyonne; "but, faith! I confess the more he drubs me in this manner, the better I shall be pleased."

The king followed M. de Lyonne with his eyes, till the door was closed behind him. He even took three steps, as if he would follow the minister; but after these three steps, he stopped, turned, and came back to the musketeer. "Now, Monsieur, said he, "let us hasten to conclude. You told me the other day, at Blois, that you were not rich?"

"But I am now, Sire."

"Yes, but that does not concern me. You have your own money, not mine; that does not enter into my account."

"I do not well understand what your Majesty means."

"Well, instead of stopping to choose your words, speak up like a man! Would you be satisfied with twenty thousand livres a year, as a fixed income?"

"But, Sire," said D'Artagnan, opening his eyes to the utmost.

"Would you be satisfied with four horses furnished and kept, and with a contingent fund for what you would require, according to occasion and need; or would you prefer a fixed sum which might be, for instance, forty thousand livres? Answer!"

"Sire, your Majesty —"

"Yes, you are surprised; that is natural, and I expected it. Answer me, come! or I shall think you have no longer that rapidity of judgment I have so much valued in you."

"It is certain, Sire, that twenty thousand livres a year make a handsome sum; but —"

"No buts! Yes or no, is it a suitable indemnity?"

"Oh! certainly —"

"You will be satisfied with it? That is well. It will be better, too, to reckon the extra expenses separately; you can arrange that with Colbert. Now let us pass to something more important."

"But, Sire, I told your Majesty —"

"That you wanted rest. I know you did; only, I replied that I would not allow it. I am master, I suppose?"

"Yes, Sire."

"Very well. You were formerly in the mood to become captain of the Musketeers?"

"Yes, Sire."

"Well, here is your commission signed. I will place it in this drawer. The day on which you shall return from a certain expedition which I am about to confide to

you, on that day you may yourself take the commission from the drawer." D'Artagnan still hesitated, and hung down his head. "Come, Monsieur," said the king, "one would believe, to look at you, that you did not know that at the court of the most Christian king the captain-general of the Musketeers takes precedence of the marshals of France."

"Sire, I know he does."

"Then I must fancy you do not put faith in my word?"

"Oh, Sire, never, never dream of such a thing!"

"I have wished to prove to you that you, so good a servant, had lost a good master; am I anything like the master that will suit you?"

"I begin to think you are, Sire."

"Then, Monsieur, you will resume your functions. Your company is quite disorganized since your departure, and the men go strolling about and rioting in the pot-houses, where they fight, in spite of my edicts or those of my father. You will reorganize the service as quickly as possible."

"Yes, Sire."

"You will not again quit my person."

"Very well, Sire."

"You will march with me to the army; you will encamp round my tent."

"Then, Sire," said D'Artagnan, "if it is only for imposing upon me a service like that, your Majesty need not give me twenty thousand livres. I shall not earn them."

"I desire that you shall keep open house, an open table; I desire that my captain of Musketeers shall be a person of importance."

"And I," said D'Artagnan, bluntly, — "I do not like easily gotten money. I like money won! Your Majesty

gives me an idle trade, which the first comer would perform for four thousand livres."

Louis XIV. began to laugh. "You are a true Gascon, M. d'Artagnan; you will draw my heart's secret from me."

"Has your Majesty a secret, then?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Well! then I accept the twenty thousand livres; for I will keep that secret, and discretion is above all price in these times. Will your Majesty speak now?"

"You will get booted, M. d'Artagnan, and mount on horseback."

"Directly, Sire."

"Within two days."

"That is well, Sire; for I have my affairs to settle before I set out, particularly if it is likely there should be any blows to receive."

"That may happen."

"Let them come. But, Sire, you have addressed yourself to the avarice, to the ambition, — you have addressed yourself to the heart of M. d'Artagnan, but you have forgotten one thing."

"What is that?"

"You have said nothing to his vanity; when shall I be a knight of the king's orders?"

"Does that interest you?"

"Why, yes. My friend Athos is quite bestarred, and that dazzles me."

"You shall be a knight of my order a month after you have taken your commission of captain."

"Ah!" said the officer, thoughtfully, "after the expedition."

"Precisely."

"Where is your Majesty going to send me?"

"Are you acquainted with Bretagne?"

"No, Sire."

"Have you any friends there?"

"In Bretagne? No, faith!"

"So much the better. Do you know anything about fortifications?"

"I believe I do, Sire," said D'Artagnan, smiling.

"That is to say, you can readily distinguish a fortress from a simple fortification, such as is allowed to our vassal *châtelains?*"

"I distinguish a fort from a rampart as I distinguish a cuirass from a pie-crust, Sire. Is that sufficient?"

"Yes, Monsieur. You will set out, then?"

"For Bretagne?"

"Yes."

"Alone?"

"Absolutely alone; that is to say, you must not even take a lackey with you."

"May I ask your Majesty for what reason?"

"Because, Monsieur, it will be necessary to disguise yourself sometimes as the servant of a good family. Your face is very well known in France, M. d'Artagnan."

"And then, Sire?"

"And then you will travel slowly through Bretagne, and will examine carefully the fortifications of that country."

"The coasts?"

"Yes, and the isles; beginning with Belle-Isle-en-Mer."

"Which belongs to M. Fouquet," said D'Artagnan, in a serious tone, raising his intelligent eyes to Louis XIV.

"I fancy you are right, Monsieur, and that Belle-Isle does belong to M. Fouquet, in fact."

"Then your Majesty wishes me to ascertain if Belle-Isle is a good place?"

"Yes."

"And if its fortifications are new or old?"

"Precisely."

"And if, perhaps, the vassals of the superintendent are sufficiently numerous to form a garrison?"

"That is what I want to know; you have hit it exactly."

"And if they are not fortifying, Sire?"

"You will travel about Bretagne, listening and judging."

"Then I am a king's spy?" said D'Artagnan, bluntly, twisting his mustache.

"No, Monsieur."

"Your pardon, Sire; I spy on your Majesty's account."

"You go on a discovery, Monsieur. Would you march at the head of your Musketeers, sword in hand, to reconnoitre any spot whatever, or an enemy's position?"

At these words D'Artagnan started imperceptibly.

"Would you," continued the king, "imagine yourself to be a spy?"

"No, no," said D'Artagnan, but pensively. "The thing changes its character when one watches an enemy; one is but a soldier. And if they are fortifying Belle-Isle?" added he, quickly.

"You will make an exact plan of the fortifications."

"Will they permit me to enter?"

"That does not concern me; that is your affair. Did you not understand that I reserved for you a contingent of twenty thousand livres per annum, if you wished for it?"

"Yes, Sire; but if they are not fortifying?"

"You will return quietly, without fatiguing your horse."

"Sire, I am ready."

"You will begin to-morrow by going to Monsieur the

Superintendent's to draw the first quarter of the pension I allow you. Do you know M. Fouquet?"

"Very little, Sire; but I beg your Majesty to observe that it is not urgent that I should know him."

"I ask your pardon, Monsieur; but he will refuse you the money I wish you to take, and it is that refusal I look for."

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan. "And then, Sire?"

"The money being refused, you will go and seek it at M. Colbert's. By the way, have you a good horse?"

"An excellent one, Sire."

"How much did it cost you?"

"A hundred and fifty pistoles."

"I will buy it of you. Here is a note for two hundred pistoles."

"But I want my horse for my journey, Sire."

"Well!"

"Well, and you take mine from me."

"Not at all. On the contrary, I give it to you. Only, as it is now mine and not yours, I am sure you will not spare it."

"Your Majesty is in a hurry, then?"

"A great hurry."

"Then what compels me to wait two days?"

"Two reasons known to myself."

"That is different. The horse may make up the two days in the eight he has for the journey; and then there is the post."

"No, no; the post compromises, M. d'Artagnan. Go, and do not forget you are mine."

"Sire, it was not I who ever forgot it. At what hour shall I take my leave of your Majesty day after to-morrow?"

"Where do you lodge?"

"I must henceforward lodge at the Louvre."

"That must not be now. Keep your lodgings in the city; I will pay for them. As for your departure, it must take place at night, because you must set out without being seen by any one, or, if you are seen, it must not be known that you belong to me. A close mouth, Monsieur!"

"Your Majesty spoils all you have said by that single word."

"I asked you where you lodged, for I cannot always send to M. le Comte de la Fère to seek you."

"I lodge with M. Planchet, a grocer, Rue des Lombards, at the sign of the Pilon d'Or."

"Go out but little; show yourself still less, and await my orders."

"And yet, Sire, I must go for the money."

"That is true; but when going to the superintendent's, where so many people are constantly going, you must mingle with the crowd."

"I want the drafts, Sire, for the money."

"Here they are."

The king signed them, and D'Artagnan looked on to assure himself of their correctness. "That is money," said he; "and money is either read or counted."

"Adieu, M. d'Artagnan!" added the king; "I think you have perfectly understood me."

"I? I understood that your Majesty sends me to Belle-Isle-en-Mer; that is all."

"To learn —"

"To learn how M. Fouquet's works are going on; that is all."

"Very well; I admit you may be captured."

"And I do not admit it," replied the Gascon, boldly.

"I admit that you may be killed," continued the king.

"That is not probable, Sire."

"In the first case, you must not speak; in the second, there must be no paper found upon you to speak."

D'Artagnan shrugged his shoulders without ceremony, and took leave of the king, saying to himself, "The English shower continues; let us remain under the spout!"

CHAPTER VI.

M. FOUQUET'S HOUSES.

While D'Artagnan was returning to Planchet's house, his head aching and bewildered with all that had just happened to him, there was passing a scene of quite a different character, which nevertheless is not foreign to the conversation our musketeer had just had with the king; only, this scene took place outside of Paris, in a house owned by the superintendent Fouquet in the village of St. Mandé.

The minister had just arrived at this country-house, followed by his chief clerk, who carried an enormous portfolio full of papers to be examined and others requiring signature. As it was about five o'clock in the afternoon, the masters had dined; supper was preparing for twenty inferior guests. The superintendent did not stop; on alighting from his carriage, with the same bound he sprang through the doorway, rushed through the apartments and gained his office, where he declared he would shut himself up to work, commanding that he should not be disturbed for anything but an order from the king. As soon as this direction had been given, Fouquet shut himself up, and two footmen were placed as sentinels at his door. Then Fouquet pushed a bolt which moved a panel that walled up the entrance, and prevented everything that passed in this office from being either seen or heard. But, improbable as it may seem, it was indeed to be alone that Fouquet shut himself up thus; for he went

straight to his desk, seated himself at it, opened the portfolio, and began to sort the enormous mass of papers it contained.

It was not more than ten minutes after he had entered and taken all the precautions we have described, that the repeated noise of several regular taps struck his ear, and appeared to engross his attention. Fouquet raised his head, turned his ear, and listened. The taps continued. Then the worker rose with a slight movement of impatience, and walked straight up to a glass behind which the blows were struck by a hand or by some invisible mechanism. It was a large glass let into a panel. Three other glasses, exactly similar to it, completed the symmetry of the apartment. Nothing distinguished that from the others. Without doubt, these repeated taps were a signal; for at the moment when Fouquet approached the glass listening, the same noise was renewed, and in the same measure.

"Oh!" murmured the superintendent, with surprise, "who is yonder? I did not expect any one to-day;" and, probably to answer the signal that had been made, he pulled a gilded nail in that same glass, and shook it thrice. Then returning to his place, and seating himself again, "Faith! let them wait," said he; and plunging again into the ocean of papers unrolled before him, he appeared to think of nothing but work. In fact, with incredible rapidity and marvellous clearness, Fouquet deciphered the largest papers and most complicated writings, correcting them, annotating them with a pen moved as if by a fever; and the work dissolving under his hands, signatures, figures, references, multiplied themselves as if ten clerks — that is to say, a hundred fingers and ten brains — had performed the duties, instead of the ten fingers and single brain of this man. From time to

time only, Fouquet, absorbed in his work, raised his head to cast a furtive glance upon a clock placed before him. The reason for this was that Fouquet had set himself a task ; and when this task was once set, in one hour's work he, by himself, did what another would not have accomplished in a day, — always certain, provided he was not disturbed, to arrive at the end in the time his devouring activity had fixed. But in the midst of his ardent labor the quick strokes upon the little bell, placed behind the glass, sounded once more, hasty, and consequently more urgent.

"The lady appears to be getting impatient," said Fouquet. "Humph ! a calm ! That must be the countess ; but no, the countess has gone to Rambouillet for three days. The president's wife, then ? Oh, no ! the president's wife would not assume such grand airs ; she would ring very humbly, and then await my good pleasure. It is very certain that while I may not know who it can be, I do know who it cannot be. And since it is not you, Marchioness, since it cannot be you, a fig for the rest !" and he went on with his work in spite of the repeated appeals of the bell.

At the end of a quarter of an hour, however, impatience seized Fouquet in his turn. He consumed rather than finished the remainder of his task ; he thrust his papers into the portfolio, and giving a glance at the mirror, while the taps continued faster than ever, "Now," said he, "whence comes all this racket ? What has happened, and who can the Ariadne be who expects me so impatiently ? Let us see !"

He then applied the tip of his finger to the nail parallel to the one he had drawn. Immediately the glass moved like the fold of a door, and discovered a secret closet, rather deep, in which the superintendent disappeared as

if going into a vast box. When there, he touched another spring, which opened, not a board, but a block of the wall ; and he went out by that opening, leaving the door to shut of itself. Then Fouquet descended a score or more of steps which sank, winding, underground, and came to a long, paved, subterranean passage, lighted by invisible loop-holes. The walls of this vault were covered with slabs, or tiles, and the floor with carpeting. This passage was under the street itself which separated Fouquet's house from the Park of Vincennes. At the end of the passage ascended a winding staircase parallel with that by which Fouquet had descended. He mounted these other stairs, entered by means of a spring placed in a closet similar to that in his office, and from this closet passed into a chamber entirely unoccupied, although furnished with the utmost elegance. As soon as he entered, he examined carefully whether the glass closed without leaving any trace, and, doubtless satisfied with his observation, he opened, by means of a small gilded key, the triple fastenings of a door in front of him. This time the door opened upon a handsome boudoir, sumptuously furnished, in which was seated upon cushions a lady of surpassing beauty, who at the sound of the lock sprang towards Fouquet.

"Good heavens!" cried the latter, starting back with astonishment. "Madame la Marquise de Bellière! you here?"

"Yes," murmured the Marchioness, — "yes; it is I, Monsieur."

"Marchioness! dear marchioness!" added Fouquet, ready to prostrate himself before her. "My God! how did you come here? and I, to keep you waiting!"

"A long time, Monsieur; yes, a very long time!"

"I am happy in thinking this waiting has appeared long to you, Marchioness!"

"Oh, an eternity, Monsieur! I rang more than twenty times. Did you not hear me?"

"Marchioness, you are pale, you are trembling."

"Did you not hear, then, that you were summoned?"

"Oh, yes, I heard plainly enough, Madame; but I could not come. After your severity and your refusal, how could I dream it was you? If I could have had any suspicion of the happiness that awaited me, believe me, Madame, I would have left everything to fall at your feet as I do at this moment."

"Are we quite alone, Monsieur?" asked the Marchioness, looking round the room.

"Oh, yes, Madame; I can assure you of that."

"Really?" said the Marchioness, in a melancholy tone.

"You sigh," said Fouquet.

"What mysteries! what precautions!" said the marchioness, with a slight bitterness of expression; "and how evident it is that you fear the least suspicion of your amours!"

"Would you prefer their being made public?"

"Oh, no! you act like a considerate man," said the marchioness, smiling.

"Come, dear marchioness, punish me not with reproaches, I implore you."

"Reproaches! Have I a right to make you any?"

"No, unfortunately, no; but tell me, you whom for a year I have loved without return and without hope —"

"You are mistaken, — without hope it is true, but not without return."

"Oh! for me, there is but one proof of love; and that proof I still want."

"I have come to bring it to you, Monsieur."

Fouquet wished to clasp her in his arms, but she disengaged herself with a slight movement.

"You persist in deceiving yourself, Monsieur, and never will accept from me the only thing I am willing to give you, — devotion."

"Ah, then, you do not love me? Devotion is but a virtue; love is a passion."

"Listen to me, I implore you! I should not have come hither without a serious motive; you are well assured of that, are you not?"

"The motive is of very little consequence, so that you are but here, — so that I see you, so that I speak to you!"

"You are right; the principal thing is that I am here without any one having seen me, and that I can speak to you."

Fouquet sank on his knees before her. "Speak! speak, Madame!" said he, "I am listening."

The marchioness looked at Fouquet, on his knees at her feet; and there was in the gaze of the woman a strange mixture of love and melancholy.

"Oh!" at length murmured she, "would that I were she who has the right of seeing you every minute, of speaking to you every instant! would that I were she who watches over you, she who has no need of mysterious springs to summon and cause to appear, like a sylph, the man she loves, to gaze at him for an hour, and then see him disappear in the darkness of a mystery still more strange at his going out than at his coming in! Oh, I should be a happy woman!"

"Do you happen, Marchioness," said Fouquet, smiling, "to be speaking of my wife?"

"Yes, certainly; of her I spoke."

"Well, you need not envy her lot, Marchioness; of all the women with whom I have relations, Madame Fouquet is the one I see the least of, and who has the least intercourse with me."

"At least, Monsieur, she is not reduced to place, as I have done, her hand upon the ornament of a mirror to call you to her; at least you do not reply to her by the mysterious, frightful sound of a bell, the spring of which comes from I don't know where; at least you have not forbidden her to endeavor to discover the secret of these communications under pain of breaking off forever your connections with her, as you have forbidden all who have come here before me, and all who shall come after me."

"Dear Marchioness, how unjust you are, and how little do you know what you are doing in thus exclaiming against mystery! It is with mystery alone we can love without trouble, and it is with love without trouble alone that we can be happy. But let us return to ourselves, to that devotion of which you were speaking; or rather, Marchioness, let me labor under a pleasing delusion, and believe that this devotion is love."

"Just now," repeated the Marchioness, passing over her eyes a hand modelled upon most graceful classic lines, — "just now I was prepared to speak; my ideas were clear, bold; now I am quite confused, quite troubled. I fear I bring you bad news."

"If it is to that bad news I owe your presence, Marchioness, welcome be that bad news! or rather, Marchioness, since you allow that I am not quite indifferent to you, let me hear nothing of the bad news, but speak of yourself."

"No, no! on the contrary, demand it of me; require me to tell it to you instantly, and not to allow myself to be turned aside by any feeling whatever. Fouquet, my friend! it is of immense importance."

"You astonish me, Marchioness; I will even say you almost frighten me. You, so serious, so collected; you who know the world we live in so well! Is it then serious?"

"Oh, very serious!"

"In the first place, how did you come here?"

"You shall know that presently; but first to something of more consequence."

"Speak, Marchioness, speak! I implore you, have pity on my impatience."

"Do you know that Colbert is made intendant of the finances?"

"Bah! Colbert, little Colbert!"

"Yes; Colbert, little Colbert!"

"Mazarin's factotum?"

"The same."

"Well! what do you see so terrific in that, dear marchioness? Little Colbert is intendant, — that is astonishing, I confess, but it is not terrific."

"Do you think the king has given, without a pressing motive, such a place to one you call a little scullion?"

"In the first place, is it positively true that the king has given it to him?"

"It is so said."

"Ay, but who says so?"

"Everybody."

"Everybody, that's nobody; mention some one likely to be well informed who says so."

"Madame Vanel."

"Ah! now you begin to frighten me in earnest," said Fouquet, laughing. "The fact is, that if any one is well informed, or ought to be well informed, it is the person you name."

"Do not speak ill of poor Marguerite, M. Fouquet; for she still loves you."

"Bah! indeed? That is scarcely credible. I thought little Colbert, as you said just now, had passed over that love, and left upon it a spot of ink or a stain of grease."

"Fouquet! Fouquet! is this the way you always act towards the poor women you desert?"

"Why, you surely are not going to undertake the defence of Madame Vanel?"

"Yes, I will undertake it; for, I repeat, she loves you still, and the proof is that she saves you."

"By your interposition, Marchioness; that is cunning on her part. No angel could be more agreeable to me, or could lead me more certainly to salvation. But let me ask you, do you know Marguerite?"

"She was my friend at the convent."

"And you say that she has informed you that M. Colbert was appointed intendant?"

"Yes, she did."

"Well, enlighten me, Marchioness; granted M. Colbert is intendant, so be it. In what can an intendant — that is to say, my subordinate, my clerk — give me umbrage or injure me, even were he M. Colbert?"

"You do not reflect, Monsieur, apparently," replied the marchioness.

"Upon what?"

"This, — that M. Colbert hates you."

"Hates me!" cried Fouquet. "Good heavens! Marchioness, whence do you come, where can you live? Hates me! why, all the world hates me, — he as others do."

"He more than others."

"More than others? let him."

"He is ambitious."

"Who is not, Marchioness?"

"Yes; but with him ambition has no bounds."

"I am quite aware of that, since he made it a point to succeed me with Madame Vanel."

"And obtained his end; look to that!"

"Do you mean to say he has the presumption to hope to pass from intendant to superintendent?"

"Have you not yourself already had the same fear?"

"Oh!" said Fouquet, "to succeed me with Madame Vanel is one thing, to succeed me with the king is another. France is not to be purchased as easily as the wife of an accountant."

"Eh! Monsieur, everything is to be bought; if not by gold, by intrigue."

"Nobody knows to the contrary better than you, Madame, — you to whom I have offered millions."

"Instead of millions, Fouquet, you should have offered me a true, single, and boundless love; I might have accepted that. So, you see still, everything is to be bought, — if not in one way, in another."

"So Colbert, in your opinion, is in a fair way to secure my place of superintendent. Make yourself easy on that head, my dear marchioness; he is not yet rich enough to purchase it."

"But if he should rob you of it?"

"Ah! that is another thing. Unfortunately, before he can reach me, — that is to say, the body of the place, — he must destroy, must make a breach in the outer works; and I am devilishly well fortified, Marchioness."

"What you call your outworks are your creatures, are they not, — your friends?"

"Exactly so."

"And is M. d'Eymeris one of your creatures?"

"Yes, he is."

"Is M. Lyodot one of your friends?"

"Certainly."

"M. de Vanin?"

"M. de Vanin! Ah! they may do what they like with him, but — "

"But —"

"But they must not touch the others."

"Well, if you are anxious they should not touch Messieurs d'Eymeris and Lyodot, it is time to look about you."

"Who threatens them?"

"Will you listen to me now?"

"Forever, Marchioness."

"Without interrupting me?"

"Speak!"

"Well, this morning Marguerite sent for me."

"And what did she want with you?"

"'I dare not see M. Fouquet myself,' said she."

"Bah! why should she think I would reproach her? Poor woman! she vastly deceives herself."

"'See him yourself,' said she, 'and tell him to beware of M. Colbert.'"

"What! she warned me to beware of her lover?"

"I have told you she still loves you."

"Go on, Marchioness!"

"'M. Colbert,' she added, 'came to me two hours ago, to inform me he was appointed intendant.'"

"I have already told you, Marchioness, that M. Colbert would only be the more in my power for that."

"Yes, but that is not all; Marguerite is intimate, as you know, with Madame d'Eymeris and Madame Lyodot."

"I know she is."

"Well, M. Colbert put many questions to her relative to the fortunes of those two gentlemen, and as to the degree of devotion they bear you."

"Oh, as for those two, I can answer for them; they must be killed before they can cease to be mine."

"Then, as Madame Vanel was obliged to leave M.

Colbert for an instant to receive a visitor, and as M. Colbert is industrious, scarcely was the new intendant left alone, before he took a pencil from his pocket, and, as there was paper on the table, began to make pencil-notes."

"Notes concerning D'Eymeris and Lyodot?"

"Exactly."

"I am curious to know what those notes were about."

"And that is just what I have brought you."

"Madame Vanel has taken Colbert's notes and sent them to me?"

"No; but by a chance which resembles a miracle, she has a duplicate of those notes."

"How could she get that?"

"Listen! I told you that Colbert found some paper on the table."

"Yes."

"That he had taken a pencil from his pocket."

"Yes."

"And had written upon that paper."

"Yes."

"Well, this pencil was a lead-pencil, consequently hard; so it marked in black upon the first sheet, and left its impression upon the second."

"Go on!"

"Colbert, when tearing off the first sheet, took no notice of the second."

"Well?"

"Well, on the second could be read what had been written on the first; Madame Vanel read it, and sent for me."

"Ah!"

"Then, when she was assured that I was your devoted friend, she gave me the paper and told me the secret of this house."

"And this paper?" said Fouquet, with some degree of agitation.

"Here it is, Monsieur; read it!" said the Marchioness.

Fouquet read: —

"Names of the farmers of the revenue to be condemned by the Chamber of Justice: D'Eymeris, friend of M. F.; Lyodot, friend of M. F.; De Vanin, indif."

"D'Eymeris and Lyodot!" cried Fouquet, re-reading.

"'Friends of M. F.,'" said the marchioness, pointing at the same time to the paper.

"But what is the meaning of these words, 'To be condemned by the Chamber of Justice'?"

"That is clear enough, I think," said the marchioness. "Besides, that is not all. Read on, read on!"

Fouquet continued: —

"The first two to death; the third to be dismissed, with Messieurs d'Hautemont and de la Valette, whose property will be confiscated."

"Great God!" cried Fouquet, "to death, to death! Lyodot and D'Eymeris! But even if the Chamber of Justice should condemn them to death, the king will never ratify their condemnation, and they cannot be executed without the king's signature."

"The king has made M. Colbert intendant."

"Oh!" cried Fouquet, as if he caught a glimpse of a yawning abyss beneath his feet, "impossible! impossible! But who passed a pencil over the marks made by Colbert?"

"I did. I was afraid the first would be effaced."

"Oh! I will know all."

"You will know nothing, Monsieur; you despise your enemy too much for that."

"Pardon me, my dear marchioness, excuse me; yes, M. Colbert is my enemy, I believe it; yes, M. Colbert is a man to be dreaded, I admit. But I — I have time; and as you are here, as you have assured me of your devotion, as you have allowed me to hope for your love, as we are alone — "

"I came here to save you, M. Fouquet, and not to ruin myself," said the marchioness, rising; "therefore beware! — "

"Marchioness, in truth you alarm yourself too much; at least, unless this alarm is but a pretext — "

"He has a deep heart, that M. Colbert; beware!"

Fouquet, in his turn, drew himself up. "And I?" asked he.

"Oh! you, — you have only a noble heart. Beware!"

"So?"

"I have done what I ought, my friend, at the risk of losing my reputation. Adieu!"

"Not adieu; *au revoir!*"

"Perhaps," said the marchioness, giving her hand to Fouquet to kiss, and walking towards the door with so firm a step that he did not dare to bar her passage.

As for Fouquet, he retraced, with head hanging down and a cloud over his brow, the path of the subterranean passage along which ran the metal wires that communicated from one house to the other, transmitting, through two mirrors, the wishes and signals of two correspondents.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ABBÉ FOUQUET.

Fouquet hastened back to his apartment by the subterranean passage, and immediately closed the mirror with the spring. He was scarcely in his office, when he heard some one knocking violently at the door, and a well-known voice crying, —

"Open the door, Monseigneur! I entreat you open the door!"

Fouquet quickly restored a little order to everything which might reveal either his absence or his agitation; he spread his papers over the desk, took up a pen, and, to gain time, said, through the closed door, "Who are you?"

"What! Monseigneur, do you not know me?" replied the voice.

"Yes," said Fouquet to himself, — "yes, my friend, I know you well enough." And then aloud: "Is it not Gourville?"

"Why, yes, Monseigneur."

Fouquet rose, darted a last look at one of his mirrors, went to the door, pushed the bolt; and Gourville entered.

"Ah, Monseigneur! Monseigneur!" said he, "what cruelty!"

"In what?"

"I have been a quarter of an hour imploring you to open the door, and you would not even answer me."

"Once for all, you know well that I will not be dis-

turbed when I am busy. Now, although I might make you an exception, Gourville, I insist upon my orders being respected by others."

"Monseigneur, at this moment, orders, doors, bolts, and walls, — I could have broken, overthrown, and split them all!"

"Ah! it relates to some great event, then?" asked Fouquet.

"Oh, I assure you it does, Monseigneur!" replied Gourville.

"And what is this event?" said Fouquet, a little troubled by the agitation of his most intimate confidant.

"There is a secret Chamber of Justice instituted, Monseigneur."

"I know there is; but do the members meet, Gourville?"

"They not only meet, but they have passed a sentence, Monseigneur."

"A sentence!" said the superintendent, with a shudder and pallor which he could not conceal. "A sentence! — and against whom?"

"Against two of your friends."

"Lyodot and D'Eymeris, do you mean? But what sort of a sentence?"

"Sentence of death."

"Passed? Oh, you must be mistaken, Gourville! that is impossible."

"Here is a copy of the sentence which the king is to sign to-day, if he has not already signed it."

Fouquet seized the paper eagerly, read it, and returned it to Gourville. "The king will never sign that," said he.

Gourville shook his head. "Monseigneur, M. Colbert is a bold councillor; do not trust to that."

"M. Colbert again!" cried Fouquet. "How is it that that name comes upon all occasions to torment my ears,

during the last two or three days? You make so trifling a subject of too much importance, Gourville. Let M. Colbert appear, I will face him; let him raise his head, I will crush him; but you understand, there must be an outline upon which my look may fall, there must be a surface upon which my feet may be placed."

"Patience, Monseigneur! for you do not know what Colbert is. Study him quickly; it is with this dark financier as it is with meteors, which the eye never sees completely before their disastrous rush; when we feel them we are dead."

"That is going too far, Gourville," replied Fouquet, smiling; "allow me, my friend, not to be so easily frightened. M. Colbert a meteor! *Corbleu*, we confront the meteor. Let us see acts, and not words. What has he done?"

"He has ordered two gibbets of the executioner of Paris," answered Gourville, quietly.

Fouquet raised his head, and a flash seemed to strike his eyes. "Are you sure of what you say?" cried he.

"Here is the proof, Monseigneur;" and Gourville held out to the superintendent a note communicated by one of the secretaries of the Hôtel de Ville, who was one of Fouquet's creatures.

"Yes, that is true," murmured the minister; "the scaffold may be prepared, but the king has not signed. Gourville, the king will not sign."

"I will soon know," said Gourville.

"How?"

"If the king has signed, the gibbets will be sent this evening to the Hôtel de Ville, in order to be put up and ready by to-morrow morning."

"Oh, no, no!" exclaimed Fouquet, once again; "you are all deceived, and deceive me in turn. Lyodot came to

see me only the day before yesterday; only three days ago I received a present of some Syracuse wine from poor D'Eymeris."

"What does that prove?" replied Gourville, "except that the Chamber of Justice has been secretly assembled, has deliberated in the absence of the accused, and that the whole proceeding was finished when they were arrested."

"But are they, then, arrested?"

"No doubt they are."

"But where, when, how have they been arrested?"

"Lyodot, yesterday, at daybreak; D'Eymeris, the day before yesterday, in the evening, as he was returning from the house of his mistress. Their disappearance had disturbed nobody; but M. Colbert all at once raised the mask and caused the affair to be published. It is being cried by sound of trumpet, at this moment, in the streets of Paris; and, in truth, Monseigneur, there is scarcely anybody but yourself ignorant of the event."

Fouquet began to walk about his chamber with an uneasiness that became more and more painful.

"What do you decide upon, Monseigneur?" said Gourville.

"If it really were as you say, I would go to the king," exclaimed Fouquet. "But as I go to the Louvre, I will pass by the Hôtel de Ville. We shall see if the sentence is signed."

"Incredulity! thou art the pest of all great minds," said Gourville, shrugging his shoulders.

"Gourville!"

"Yes," continued he; "and thou ruinest them, as contagion destroys the most robust health, — that is to say, in an instant."

"Let us go," cried Fouquet; "open the door, Gourville!"

"Be cautious!" said the latter; "the Abbé Fouquet is there."

"Ah, my brother!" replied Fouquet, in a tone of annoyance; "he is there, is he? He knows all the ill news, then, and is delighted to bring it to me, as is his custom. The devil! if my brother is there, my affairs are bad, Gourville; why did you not tell me that sooner? I should have been the more readily convinced."

"Monseigneur calumniates him," said Gourville, laughing; "if he has come, it is not with a bad intention."

"What! do you excuse him?" exclaimed Fouquet; "a fellow without a heart, without ideas, a devourer of wealth!"

"He knows you are rich."

"And would ruin me."

"No, but he would like to have your purse; that is all."

"Enough! enough! A hundred thousand crowns per month, during two years. *Corbleu!* it is I that pay, Gourville, and I know my figures." Gourville began to laugh in a silent, sly manner. "Yes, you mean to say it is the king who pays," said the superintendent. "Ah, Gourville, that is a vile joke; this is not the place."

"Monseigneur, do not be angry."

"Well, then, send away the Abbé Fouquet; I have not a sou." Gourville made a step towards the door. "He has been a month without seeing me," continued Fouquet; "why could he not be two months?"

"Because he repents of living in bad company," said Gourville, "and prefers you to all his bandits."

"Thanks for the preference! You make a strange advocate, Gourville, to-day, — the advocate of the Abbé Fouquet!"

"Eh! but everything and every man has his good side, — his useful side, Monseigneur."

"The bandits whom the abbé keeps in pay and drink have their useful side, have they? Prove me that, if you please."

"Let the circumstance arise, Monseigneur, and you will be very glad to have these bandits at hand."

"You advise me, then, to be reconciled to the abbé?" said Fouquet, ironically.

"I advise you, Monseigneur, not to quarrel with a hundred or a hundred and twenty scapegraces, who by putting their rapiers end to end would form a cordon of steel capable of surrounding three thousand men."

Fouquet darted a searching glance at Gourville, and passing before him, — "That is all very well. — Let M. l'Abbé Fouquet be introduced," said he to the footman. "You are right, Gourville."

Two minutes after, the abbé appeared in the doorway, with profound reverences. He was a man of from forty to forty-five years of age, half churchman, half soldier, — a brawler grafted upon an abbé; upon seeing that he had not a sword by his side, you might be sure he had pistols. Fouquet saluted him as an elder brother rather than as a minister.

"What can I do to serve you, Monsieur the Abbé?" said he.

"How you speak that to me, Brother!"

"I speak it like a man who is in a hurry, Monsieur."

The abbé looked maliciously at Gourville, and anxiously at Fouquet, and said, "I have three hundred pistoles to pay to M. de Bregi this evening, — a play debt, a sacred debt."

"And what else?" said Fouquet, bravely; for he knew that the Abbé Fouquet would not have disturbed him for such a trifle.

"A thousand to my butcher, who will supply no more."

"What more?"

"Twelve hundred to my tailor," continued the abbé; "the fellow has made me take back seven suits of my people's, which compromises my livery. And my mistress talks of replacing me with a farmer of the revenue, which would be a humiliation for the Church."

"What else is there?" said Fouquet.

"You will please to remark," said the abbé, humbly, "that I have asked nothing for myself."

"That is considerate, Monsieur," replied Fouquet; "so, as you see, I am waiting."

"And I ask nothing, oh, no! but it is not because I need nothing, I assure you."

The minister reflected a minute. "Twelve hundred pistoles to the tailor; that seems a great deal for clothes," said he.

"I maintain a hundred men," said the abbé, proudly; "that is a burden, I believe."

"Why a hundred men?" said Fouquet. "Are you a Richelieu or a Mazarin, to require a hundred men as a guard? What use do you make of these hundred men? Speak! say!"

"And do you ask me that?" cried the Abbé Fouquet. "Ah! how can you put such a question, — why I maintain a hundred men? Ah!"

"Why, yes, I do put that question to you. What have you to do with a hundred men? Answer!"

"Ingrate!" continued the abbé, more and more affected.

"Explain yourself."

"Why, Monsieur the Superintendent, I only want one *valet de chambre,* for my part, and even if I were alone, could help myself very well; but you, — you who have so many enemies, — a hundred men are not enough for me

to defend you with. A hundred men! — you ought to have ten thousand. I maintain, then, all these men in order that in public places, in assemblies, no voice may be raised against you; and without them, Monsieur, you would be loaded with imprecations, you would be torn to pieces, you would not last a week, — no, not a week; do you hear?"

"Ah! I did not know you were my champion to such an extent, Monsieur the Abbé."

"You doubt it!" cried the abbé. "Listen, then, to what happened not longer ago than yesterday in the Rue de la Huchette. A man was cheapening a fowl."

"Well, how could that injure me, Abbé?"

"In this way. The fowl was not fat. The purchaser refused to give eighteen sous for it, saying that he could not afford eighteen sous for the skin of a fowl of which M. Fouquet had had all the fat."

"Go on!"

"The joke caused a deal of laughter," continued the abbé, — "laughter at your expense, death to all the devils! and the rabble crowded around. The joker added, 'Give me a fowl fed by M. Colbert, if you like, and I will pay all you ask;' and immediately there was a clapping of hands. A frightful scandal, you understand, — a scandal which forces a brother to hide his face."

Fouquet colored. "And you hid it?" said the superintendent.

"No; for it so happened I had one of my men in the crowd, — a new recruit from the provinces, one M. de Menneville, whom I like very much. He made his way through the press, saying to the joker: 'By the thousand beards! Monsieur false joker, here's a thrust for Colbert!' 'And one for Fouquet,' replied the joker. Upon which they drew, in front of the cook's shop, with a hedge

of the curious round them, and five hundred as curious at the windows."

"Well?" said Fouquet.

"Well, Monsieur, my Menneville spitted the joker, to the great amazement of the spectators, and said to the cook, 'Take this goose, my friend; it is fatter than your fowl.' That is the way, Monsieur," ended the abbé, triumphantly, "in which I spend my revenues; I maintain the honor of the family, Monsieur." Fouquet hung his head. "And I have a hundred as good as he," pursued the abbé.

"Very well," said Fouquet; "give your account to Gourville, and remain here this evening."

"Shall we have supper?"

"Yes, there will be supper."

"But the chest is closed."

"Gourville will open it for you. Leave us, Monsieur the Abbé, leave us."

"Then we are friends," said the abbé, with a bow.

"Oh, yes! friends. — Come, Gourville!"

"Are you going out? You will not sup, then?"

"I shall be back in an hour; never fear, Abbé." Then, aside to Gourville, "Let them harness my English horses," said he, "and direct the coachman to stop at the Hôtel de Ville de Paris."

CHAPTER VIII.

M. DE LA FONTAINE'S WINE.

Carriages were already bringing Fouquet's guests to St. Mandé, already the whole household were animated with the preparations for supper, when the superintendent launched his fleet horses upon the road to Paris; and going by the quays in order to meet with fewer people on his route, he reached the Hôtel de Ville. It wanted a quarter to eight. Fouquet alighted at the corner of the Rue de Long-pont, and on foot directed his course towards the Place de Grève, accompanied by Gourville. At the turning into the Place, they saw a man dressed in black and violet, of good mien, who was preparing to get into a hired carriage, and was telling the coachman to stop at Vincennes. He had before him a large hamper filled with bottles, which he had just purchased at the pot-house with the sign of "L'Image de Notre-Dame."

"Eh! but that is Vatel, my steward!" said Fouquet to Gourville.

"Yes, Monseigneur," replied the latter.

"What can he have been doing at the sign of L'Image de Notre-Dame?"

"Buying wine, no doubt."

"What! buy wine for me at a pot-house!" said Fouquet. "My cellar, then, must be in a miserable condition!" and he advanced towards the steward, who was arranging his bottles in the carriage with the minutest care.

"Holloa, Vatel!" said he, in the voice of a master.

"Take care, Monseigneur!" said Gourville; "you will be recognized."

"Well! Of what consequence? — Vatel!"

The man dressed in black and violet turned round. He had a mild and good countenance, without expression, — that of a mathematician, less the pride. A certain fire sparkled in the eyes of this personage, a rather sly smile played round his lips; but the observer might soon have noticed that this fire and this smile applied to nothing, enlightened nothing. Vatel laughed like an absent man, and amused himself like a child. At the sound of his master's voice, he turned round, exclaiming, "Oh! Monseigneur!"

"Yes, it is I. What the devil are you doing here, Vatel? Wine! You are buying wine at a pot-house in the Place de Grève!"

"But, Monseigneur," said Vatel, quietly, after having darted a hostile glance at Gourville, "why am I interfered with here? Is my cellar kept in bad order?"

"No, Vatel, certainly not; but — "

"But what?" replied Vatel.

Gourville touched the elbow of Fouquet.

"Don't be angry, Vatel; I thought my cellar — your cellar — sufficiently well stocked for us to be able to dispense with having recourse to the Image de Notre-Dame."

"Eh, Monsieur," said Vatel, sinking from Monseigneur to Monsieur with a degree of disdain; "your cellar is so well stocked that when certain of your guests dine with you they have nothing to drink."

Fouquet, in great surprise, looked at Gourville, then at Vatel. "What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that your butler had not wines for all tastes, Monsieur; and that M. de la Fontaine, M. Pellisson, and M. Conrart do not drink when they come to the house, —

those Messieurs do not like strong wine. What is to be done, then?"

"Well, and so?"

"Well, then, I have found here a *vin de Joigny*, which they like. I know they come once a week to drink at the Image de Notre-Dame. That is the reason why I get this supply."

Fouquet had no more to say; he was almost convinced.

Vatel, on his part, had much more to say, without doubt; and it was plain he was getting warm. "It is just as if you would reproach me, Monseigneur, for going myself to the Rue Planche-Mibray to fetch the cider M. Loret drinks when he comes to dine at your house."

"Loret drinks cider at my house!" exclaimed Fouquet, laughing.

"Certainly he does, Monsieur; and that is the reason why he likes to dine there."

"Vatel," cried Fouquet, grasping the hand of his steward, "you are a man! I thank you, Vatel, for having understood that at my house M. de la Fontaine, M. Conrart, and M. Loret are as great as dukes and peers, as great as princes, greater than myself. Vatel, you are a good servant, and I double your salary."

Vatel did not even thank his master; he merely shrugged his shoulders a little, murmuring this superb sentiment: "To be thanked for having done one's duty is humiliating."

"He is right," said Gourville, as he drew Fouquet's attention, by a gesture, to another point. He showed him a low-built cart, drawn by two horses, upon which rocked two strong gibbets, bound together back to back by chains, while an archer, seated upon the thickness of the post, underwent, as well as he could, with his head bent down, the comments of a hundred vagabonds, who guessed the destination of the gibbets, and were escorting

them to the Hôtel de Ville. Fouquet started. "It is decided, you see," said Gourville.

"But it is not done," replied Fouquet.

"Oh, do not delude yourself, Monseigneur; if they have thus lulled your friendship and your suspicions, — if things have gone so far, you will undo nothing."

"But I have not ratified."

"M. de Lyonne has ratified for you."

"I will go to the Louvre."

"Oh, no, you will not!"

"Would you advise such baseness?" cried Fouquet. "Would you advise me to abandon my friends? Would you advise me, while able to fight, to throw the arms I have in my hand to the ground?"

"I do not advise you to do anything of the kind, Monseigneur. Are you in a position to give up the post of superintendent at this moment?"

"No."

"Well, if the king wishes to displace you — "

"He will displace me absent as well as present."

"Yes, but you will never have insulted him."

"Yes, but I shall have been base. Now, I am not willing that my friends should die; and they shall not die!"

"For that is it necessary you should go to the Louvre?"

"Gourville!"

"Beware! once at the Louvre, you will be forced to defend your friends openly, — that is to say, to make a profession of faith; or you will be forced to abandon them irrevocably."

"Never!"

"Pardon me, — the king will propose the alternative to you imperatively, or else you will propose it to him yourself."

"That is true."

"That is the reason why conflict must be avoided. Let us return to St. Mandé, Monseigneur."

"Gourville, I will not stir from this place, where the crime is to be carried out, where my disgrace is to be accomplished; I will not stir, I say, till I have found some means of combating my enemies."

"Monseigneur," replied Gourville, "you would excite my pity, if I did not know you to be one of the great spirits of this world. You possess a hundred and fifty millions; you are equal to the king in position, and a hundred and fifty millions his superior in money. M. Colbert has not even had the wit to have the will of Mazarin accepted. Now, when a man is the richest person in a kingdom, and will take the trouble to spend money, if that be done which he does not like, it is because he is a poor man. Let us return to St. Mandé, I tell you."

"To consult with Pellisson? We will."

"No, Monseigneur; to count your money."

"So be it!" said Fouquet, with his eyes inflamed. "Yes, yes, to St. Mandé!"

He got into his carriage again, and Gourville with him. Upon their road, at the end of the Faubourg St. Antoine, they overtook the humble equipage of Vatel, who was quietly conveying his *vin de Joigny*. The black horses, going at a swift pace, alarmed, as they passed, the timid hack of the steward, who, putting his head out at the window, cried, in a fright, "Look out for my bottles!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE GALLERY OF ST. MANDÉ.

Fifty persons were waiting for the superintendent. He did not even take the time to place himself in the hands of his *valet de chambre* for a minute, but from the vestibule went straight into the first drawing-room. There his friends were assembled in full chat. The steward was waiting to order supper to be served; but, above all, the Abbé Fouquet was watching for his brother's return, and was endeavoring to do the honors of the house in his absence. Upon the arrival of the superintendent, a murmur of joy and affection was heard: Fouquet, full of affability, good humor, and munificence, was beloved by his poets, his artists, and his men of business. His brow, upon which his little court read, as upon that of a god, all the movements of his soul, and thence drew rules of conduct, — his brow, upon which affairs of State never impressed a wrinkle, was this evening paler than usual, and more than one friendly eye remarked that paleness. Fouquet placed himself at the centre of the table, and presided gayly during supper. He told about Vatel's expedition to La Fontaine; he related the history of Menneville and the thin fowl to Pellisson, in such a manner that all the table heard it. A tempest of laughter and jokes ensued, which was only checked by a serious and even sad gesture from Pellisson.

The Abbé Fouquet, not being able to comprehend why his brother should have led the conversation in that

direction, listened with all his ears, and sought in the countenance of Gourville, or in that of his brother, an explanation which neither afforded him.

Pellisson took up the matter. "Did they mention M. Colbert, then?" said he.

"Why not," replied Fouquet, "if it be true, as it is said to be, that the king has made him his intendant?"

Scarcely had Fouquet uttered these words, pronounced with a marked intention, when an explosion broke forth among the guests.

"The miser!" said one.

"The mean, pitiful fellow!" said another.

"The hypocrite!" said a third.

Pellisson exchanged a meaning look with Fouquet. "Messieurs," said he, "in truth we are abusing a man whom no one knows, — that is neither charitable nor reasonable; and here is Monsieur the Superintendent, who, I am sure, agrees with me."

"Entirely," replied Fouquet. "Let M. Colbert's fat fowls alone; our business to-day is with M. Vatel's truffled pheasants."

This speech dispelled the dark cloud which was beginning to throw its shade over the guests. Gourville succeeded so well in animating the poets with the *vin de Joigny*, and the abbé, intelligent as a man who stands in need of another's gold-pieces, so enlivened the financiers and men of the sword, that, amid the vapors of this joy and the noise of conversation the subject of uneasiness disappeared completely. The will of Cardinal Mazarin was the text of the conversation at the second course and dessert; then Fouquet ordered dishes of preserved fruit and fountains of liqueurs to be carried into the hall adjoining the gallery. He led the way thither, conducting by the hand a lady, — the queen, by his

preference, of the evening. The musicians then took their supper; and promenading in the gallery and in the garden began, beneath a spring sky, amid mild and perfumed breezes.

Pellisson then approached the superintendent, and said, "Something troubles Monseigneur?"

"Greatly," replied the minister; "ask Gourville to tell you what it is."

Pellisson, on turning round, found La Fontaine treading upon his heels. He was obliged to listen to a Latin verse which the poet had composed upon Vatel. La Fontaine had for an hour been scanning this verse in every corner, seeking some one to pour it out upon advantageously. He thought he had caught Pellisson, but the latter escaped him; he turned towards Loret, who had himself just composed a quatrain in honor of the supper and the host. La Fontaine in vain endeavored to dispose of his verses; Loret wanted to obtain a hearing for his quatrain. He was obliged to retire before M. le Comte de Chanost, whose arm Fouquet had just taken. The Abbé Fouquet perceived that the poet, as absent as usual, was about to follow the two talkers; and he interposed. La Fontaine seized upon him, and recited his verses. The abbé, who did not know Latin, nodded his head, in cadence, at every roll which La Fontaine imparted to his body, according to the undulations of the dactyls and spondees. While this was going on behind the fruit-dishes, Fouquet related the event of the day to his son-in-law, M. de Chanost.

"We must send the idle and useless to look at the fireworks," said Pellisson to Gourville, "while we converse here."

"So be it," said Gourville, addressing four words to Vatel.

The latter then led towards the gardens the greater part of the beaux, the ladies, and the chatterers; while the men walked in the gallery, lighted by three hundred wax-lights, in the sight of all the admirers of fireworks, who were running off to the garden. Gourville approached Fouquet, and said, "Monsieur, we are all here."

"All?" said Fouquet.

"Yes; count!"

The superintendent turned and counted; there were eight persons. Pellisson and Gourville walked arm in arm, as if conversing upon indifferent subjects. Loret and two officers imitated them, going in an opposite direction. The Abbé Fouquet walked alone. Fouquet, with M. de Chanost, walked as if entirely absorbed by the conversation of his son-in-law. "Messieurs," said he, "let no one of you raise his head as he walks, or appear to pay attention to me; continue walking. We are alone; listen to me!"

A complete silence ensued, disturbed only by the distant cries of the happy guests, from the groves whence they beheld the fireworks. It was an odd spectacle this, that of these men walking in groups, as if each one were occupied about something, while lending attention really to only one among them, who himself seemed to be speaking only to his companion.

"Messieurs," said Fouquet, "you have, without doubt, noticed the absence of two of my friends this evening, who were with us on Wednesday. For God's sake, Abbé, do not stop, — it is not necessary, to enable you to listen; walk on, carrying your head in a natural way; and as you have an excellent sight, place yourself at the open window, and if any one returns towards the gallery, give us notice by coughing." The abbé obeyed.

"I have not remarked the absent," said Pellisson, who at this moment was turning his back to Fouquet, and walking the other way.

"I do not see M. Lyodot," said Loret, "who pays me my pension."

"And I," said the abbé, at the window, "do not see M. d'Eymeris, who owes me eleven hundred livres from our last game at brelan."

"Loret," continued Fouquet, walking bent and gloomily, "you will never receive your pension any more from Lyodot; and you, Abbé, will never be paid your eleven hundred livres by D'Eymeris: for both are about to die."

"To die!" exclaimed the whole assembly, stopped, in spite of themselves, in the scene they were playing, by that terrible word.

"Recover yourselves, Messieurs," said Fouquet; "for perhaps we are watched: I said, to die!"

"To die!" repeated Pellisson; "what! the men I saw not six days ago, full of health, gayety, and confidence! What, then, is man, good God! that disease should thus bring him down all at once?"

"It is not a disease," said Fouquet.

"Then there is a remedy," said Loret.

"No remedy. Messieurs Lyodot and d'Eymeris are on the eve of their last day."

"Of what are these gentlemen dying, then?" asked an officer.

"Ask of him who kills them," replied Fouquet.

"Who kills them? Are they being killed, then?" cried the terrified chorus.

"They do better still; they are hanging them," murmured Fouquet, in a sinister voice, which sounded like a funeral knell in that rich gallery, splendid with pictures,

flowers, velvet, and gold. Involuntarily every one stopped; the abbé left his window; the first rockets of the fireworks began to mount above the tops of the trees. A prolonged shout from the gardens attracted the superintendent to enjoy the spectacle. He drew near to a window, and his friends placed themselves behind him, attentive to his least wish. "Messieurs," said he, "M. Colbert has caused to be arrested, has tried, and will execute my two friends; what does it become me to do?"

"*Mordioux!*" exclaimed the abbé, the first to speak; "run M. Colbert through the body."

"Monseigneur," said Pellisson, "you must speak to his Majesty."

"The king, my dear Pellisson, has signed the order for the execution."

"Well!" said the Comte de Chanost, "the execution must not take place, then; that is all."

"Impossible!" said Gourville, "unless we could corrupt the jailers."

"Or the governor," said Fouquet.

"This night the prisoners might be allowed to escape."

"Which of you will undertake the transaction?"

"I," said the abbé, "will carry the money."

"And I," said Pellisson, "will carry the message."

"Words and money," said Fouquet: "five hundred thousand livres to the governor of the *conciergerie*, that is sufficient; nevertheless, it shall be a million, if necessary."

"A million!" cried the abbé; "why, for less than that, I would cause the half of Paris to be sacked."

"There must be no disorder," said Pellisson. "The governor being won over, the two prisoners will escape; once clear of the fangs of the law, they will call together the enemies of Colbert, and prove to the king

that his young justice, like all other exaggerations, is not infallible."

"Go to Paris, then, Pellisson," said Fouquet, "and bring hither the two victims; to-morrow we shall see. — Gourville, give Pellisson the five hundred thousand livres."

"Take care the wind does not carry you away!" said the abbé. "What a responsibility! Let me help you a little."

"Silence!" said Fouquet, "somebody is coming. Ah! the fireworks are producing a magical effect."

At this moment a shower of sparks fell rustling among the branches of the neighboring trees. Pellisson and Gourville went out together by the door of the gallery; Fouquet descended with the others to the garden.

CHAPTER X.

THE EPICUREANS.

While Fouquet was giving, or appearing to give, all his attention to the brilliant illuminations, the languishing music of the violins and hautboys, the sparkling sheaves of fireworks, which, inflaming the heavens with glowing reflections, marked behind the trees the dark profile of the donjon of Vincennes, — while, we say, the superintendent was smiling on the ladies and the poets, the *fête* was not less gay than ordinary; and Vatel, whose restless, even jealous, look earnestly consulted the eye of Fouquet, did not appear dissatisfied with the reception given to the ordering of the evening's entertainment.

The fireworks over, the company dispersed about the gardens and beneath the marble porticos, with that careless freedom which shows in the master of the house such forgetfulness of greatness, courteous hospitality, and magnificent unconcern. The poets wandered about, arm in arm, through the groves; some reclined upon beds of moss, to the great detriment of velvet clothes and curled heads, into which little dried leaves and blades of grass insinuated themselves. The ladies, in small numbers, listened to the songs of the singers and the verses of the poets; others listened to the prose, spoken with much art, of men who were neither actors nor poets, but to whom youth and solitude gave an unaccustomed eloquence, which appeared to them preferable to all.

"Why," said La Fontaine, "does not our master

Epicurus descend into the garden? Epicurus never abandoned his pupils; the master is wrong."

"Monsieur," said Conrart, "you are very wrong in persisting to claim the name of an Epicurean; indeed, nothing here reminds me of the doctrine of the philosopher of Gargetta."

"Bah!" said La Fontaine, "is it not written that Epicurus purchased a large garden, and lived in it tranquilly with his friends?"

"That is true."

"Well, has not M. Fouquet purchased a large garden at St. Mandé, and do we not live here very tranquilly with him and his friends?"

"Yes, without doubt. Unfortunately, it is neither the garden nor the friends which can make the resemblance. Now, what likeness is there between the doctrine of Epicurus and that of M. Fouquet?"

"This, — pleasure gives happiness."

"Next."

"Well, I do not think we ought to consider ourselves unfortunate, — for my part, at least. A good repast, — *vin de Joigny*, which they have the delicacy to go and fetch for me from my favorite public-house; not one impertinence heard during a supper of an hour long, in spite of the presence of ten millionnaires and twenty poets!"

"Stop there! You mentioned *vin de Joigny* and a good repast; do you persist in that?"

"I persist, — *anteco*, as they say at Port Royal."

"Then please to recollect that the great Epicurus lived, and made his pupils live, upon bread, vegetables, and clear water."

"That is not certain," said La Fontaine; "and you may be confounding Epicurus with Pythagoras, my dear Conrart."

"Remember, likewise, that the ancient philosopher was rather a bad friend of the gods and the magistrates."

"Oh, I cannot admit that," replied La Fontaine. "Epicurus was like M. Fouquet."

"Do not compare him to Monsieur the Superintendent," said Conrart, in an agitated voice, "or you would accredit the reports which are circulated concerning him and us."

"What reports?"

"That we are bad Frenchmen, lukewarm with regard to the monarch, deaf to the law."

"I return, then, to my text," said La Fontaine. "Listen, Conrart! This is the morality of Epicurus, whom, besides, I consider, if I must tell you so, a myth. All which touches the least upon antiquity is a myth. Jupiter, if we give a little attention to it, is life. Alcides is strength. The words are there to bear me out: 'Zeus,' that is *zen*, to live; 'Alcides,' that is *alce*, vigor. Well, 'Epicurus;' that is mild watchfulness, that is protection. Now, who watches better over the State, or who protects individuals better, than M. Fouquet?"

"You talk etymology, and not morality; I say that we modern Epicureans are troublesome citizens."

"Oh!" exclaimed La Fontaine, "if we become troublesome citizens, it will not be in following the maxims of our master. Listen to one of his principal aphorisms, — 'Wish for good leaders.'"

"Well?"

"Well, what does M. Fouquet say to us every day? 'When shall we be governed?' Does he say so? Come, Conrart, be frank!"

"He says so, certainly."

"Well, that is a doctrine of Epicurus."

"Yes; but that is a little seditious, observe."

"How?—seditious to wish to be governed by good leaders?"

"Certainly, when those who govern are bad."

"Patience! I have a reply for all."

"Even for that I have just said to you?"

"Listen! 'Would you submit to those who govern ill?' Oh! it is written: *Cacos politeuousi.* You grant me the text?"

"*Pardieu!* I think so. Do you know that you speak Greek as well as Æsop did, my dear La Fontaine?"

"Is there any wickedness in that, my dear Conrart?"

"God forbid!"

"Then let us return to M. Fouquet. What did he repeat to us all day long? Was it not this: 'What a vulgar pedant is that Mazarin! what an ass! what a leech! We must, however, submit to the fellow!' Now, Conrart, did he say so, or did he not?"

"I confess that he said it, and even perhaps too often."

"Like Epicurus, my friend, still like Epicurus. I repeat, we are Epicureans; and that is very amusing."

"Yes; but I am afraid there will rise up, by the side of us, a sect like that of Epictetus. You know him well,—the philosopher of Hieropolis,—he who called bread luxury, vegetables prodigality, and clear water drunkenness; he who being beaten by his master, said to him, grumbling a little it is true, but without being very angry, 'I will lay a wager you have broken my leg!' and he won his wager."

"He was a gosling, that Epictetus!"

"Granted; but he might easily become the fashion by only changing his name into that of Colbert."

"Bah!" replied La Fontaine, "that is impossible; never will you find Colbert in Epictetus."

"You are right; I shall find — *Coluber* [serpent] there, at the most."

"Ah! you are beaten, Conrart; you are reduced to a play upon words. M. Arnault pretends that I have no logic; I have more than M. Nicolle."

"Yes," retorted Conrart; "you have logic, but you are a Jansenist."

This argument was hailed by an immense shout of laughter. By degrees the promenaders had been attracted by the exclamations of the two quibblers around the arbor under which they were arguing. All the discussion had been listened to with religious silence; and Fouquet himself, scarcely able to suppress his laughter, had given an example of moderation. But the *dénouement* of the scene threw off all restraint; he laughed aloud. Everybody laughed as he did, and the two philosophers received unanimous felicitations. La Fontaine, however, was declared conqueror, on account of his profound erudition and his irrefragable logic. Conrart obtained the compensation due to an unsuccessful combatant, — he was praised for the loyalty of his intentions and the purity of his conscience.

At the moment when this mirth was manifesting itself by the most lively demonstrations, — at the moment when the ladies were reproaching the two adversaries with not having admitted women into the system of Epicurean happiness, — Gourville was seen hastening from the other end of the garden, approaching Fouquet, who surveyed him anxiously, and detaching him, by his presence alone, from the group. The superintendent preserved upon his face the smile and the expression of unconcern; but as soon as they had withdrawn from view he threw off the mask. "Well," said he, eagerly, "where is Pellisson? What is he doing?"

"Pellisson has returned from Paris."

"Has he brought back the prisoners?"

"He has not even seen the *concierge* of the prison."

"What! did he not tell him he came from me?"

"He told him so; but the *concierge* sent him this reply: 'If any one came to me from M. Fouquet, he would have a letter from M. Fouquet.'"

"Oh!" cried the latter, "if a letter is all he wants —"

"Never, Monsieur," said Pellisson, showing himself at the corner of the little wood, "never! Go yourself, and speak in your own name."

"You are right. I will go into the house, as if to work; let the horses remain harnessed, Pellisson. Entertain my friends, Gourville."

"One last word of advice, Monseigneur," replied the latter.

"Speak, Gourville!"

"Do not go to the *concierge* but at the last minute; it is brave, but it is not wise. Excuse me, M. Pellisson, if I am not of the same opinion as you; but believe me, Monseigneur, send again a message to this *concierge*, — he is a worthy man, — but do not carry it yourself."

"I will think of it," said Fouquet; "besides, we have the whole night before us."

"Do not reckon too much upon time; were the time we have double what it is, it would not be too much," replied Pellisson. "It is never a fault to arrive too soon."

"Adieu!" said the superintendent. "Come with me, Pellisson! Gourville, I commend my guests to your care;" and he set off. The Epicureans did not perceive that the head of the school had disappeared; the violins continued playing all night.

CHAPTER XI.

A QUARTER OF AN HOUR'S DELAY.

Fouquet, on leaving his house for the second time that day, felt less heavy and less disturbed than might have been expected. He turned towards Pellisson, who was gravely meditating in the corner of the carriage some good arguments against the violent proceedings of Colbert.

"My dear Pellisson," said Fouquet, "it is a great pity you are not a woman."

"I think, on the contrary, it is very fortunate," replied Pellisson; "for, Monseigneur, I am excessively ugly."

"Pellisson! Pellisson!" said the superintendent, laughing, "you repeat so often that you are ugly, that you may lead people to believe it gives you much pain."

"In fact it does, Monseigneur, much. There is no man more unfortunate than I. I was handsome; the small-pox rendered me hideous; I am deprived of a great means of seduction. Now I am your chief clerk, or something of that sort. I take great interest in your affairs; and if at this moment I were a pretty woman, I could render you an important service."

"What?"

"I would go and find the *concierge* of the Palais. I would seduce him, — for he is a gallant man, extravagantly fond of women; then I would get away our two prisoners."

"I hope to be able to do so myself, although I am not a pretty woman," replied Fouquet.

"Granted, Monseigneur; but you are compromising yourself greatly."

"Oh!" cried Fouquet, suddenly, with one of those secret transports which the generous blood of youth or the remembrance of some sweet emotion infuses into the heart,— "oh! I know a woman who will enact the personage we stand in need of with the lieutenant-governor of the *conciergerie.*"

"And on my part I know fifty, Monseigneur, — fifty trumpets, who will inform the universe of your generosity, of your devotion to your friends, and consequently will ruin you sooner or later while ruining themselves."

"I do not speak of such women, Pellisson. I speak of a noble and beautiful creature who joins to the intelligence and wit of her sex the worth and coolness of ours; I speak of a woman handsome enough to make the walls of a prison bow down to salute her, of a woman discreet enough to let no one suspect by whom she has been sent."

"A treasure!" said Pellisson; "you would make a famous present to Monsieur the governor of the *conciergerie! Peste!* Monseigneur, he might have his head cut off, — that might happen; but he would, before dying, have had such happiness as man never enjoyed before him."

"And I add," said Fouquet, "that the *concierge* of the Palais would not have his head cut off; for he would receive of me my horses to effect his escape, and five hundred thousand livres wherewith to live comfortably in England. I add that this woman, my friend, would give him nothing but the horses and the money. Let us go and seek this woman, Pellisson."

The superintendent reached forth his hand towards the

gold and silken cord placed inside his carriage, but Pellisson stopped him. "Monseigneur," said he, "you are going to lose as much time in seeking this woman as Columbus took to discover the new world. Now, we have but two hours in which we can possibly succeed; the *concierge* once gone to bed, how shall we get at him without making a disturbance? When daylight dawns, how can we conceal our proceedings? Go, Monseigneur, go yourself, and do not seek either woman or angel to-night."

"But, my dear Pellisson, here we are before her door."

"What! before the angel's door?"

"Why, yes."

"This is the hotel of Madame de Bellière!"

"Hush!"

"Ah! Good Lord!" exclaimed Pellisson.

"What have you to say against her?" demanded Fouquet.

"Nothing, alas! and it is that which makes me despair. Nothing, absolutely nothing. Why can I not, on the contrary, say ill enough of her to prevent your going to her?"

But Fouquet had already given orders to stop, and the carriage was motionless. "Prevent me!" cried Fouquet; "why, no power on earth should prevent my going to pay my compliments to Madame de Plessis-Bellière; besides, who knows that we shall not stand in need of her? Will you go in with me?"

"No, Monseigneur, no!"

"But I do not wish you to wait for me, Pellisson," replied Fouquet, with sincere courtesy.

"The greater reason why I should, Monseigneur; knowing that you are keeping me waiting, you will perhaps stay a shorter time. Take care! You see there is a carriage in the courtyard; she has some one with her."

Fouquet leaned towards the step of the carriage. "One word more," cried Pellisson; "do not go to this lady till you have been to the *conciergerie*, for heaven's sake!"

"Eh! five minutes, Pellisson," replied Fouquet, alighting at the steps of the hotel, leaving Pellisson in the carriage in a very ill humor.

Fouquet ran upstairs, told his name to the footman, which excited an eagerness and a respect that showed the habit the mistress of the house had of honoring that name in her family.

"Monsieur the Superintendent," exclaimed the marchioness, advancing, very pale, to meet him; "what an honor! what an unexpected pleasure!" said she. Then in a low voice, "Take care! Marguerite Vanel is here!"

"Madame," replied Fouquet, rather agitated, "I came upon business. One single word, in haste, if you please!" and he entered the salon.

Madame Vanel had risen, more pale, more livid, than Envy herself. Fouquet in vain addressed her with the most agreeable, most pacific salutation; she only replied by a terrible glance darted at the marchioness and Fouquet. This keen glance of a jealous woman is a stiletto which pierces every cuirass; Marguerite Vanel plunged it straight into the hearts of the two confidants. She made a courtesy to *her friend*, a more profound one to Fouquet, and took leave, under pretence of having a great number of visits to make, without the marchioness, or M. Fouquet, each a prey to anxiety, trying to prevent her. She was scarcely out of the room, and Fouquet left alone with the marchioness, when he threw himself on his knees without saying a word.

"I expected you," said the marchioness, with a tender sigh.

"Oh, no," cried he, "or you would have sent away that woman."

"She has been here scarcely a quarter of an hour, and I had no suspicion she would come this evening."

"You do love me a little, then, Marchioness?"

"That is not the question now, Monsieur; it is of your danger. How are your affairs going on?"

"I am going this evening to get my friends out of the Palais prisons."

"How will you do that?"

"By buying and seducing the governor."

"He is a friend of mine; can I assist you without injuring you?"

"Oh, Marchioness, it would be a signal service; but how can you be employed without being compromised? Now, never shall my life, my power, or even my liberty be purchased at the expense of a single tear from your eyes, or of a single pain to your heart!"

"Monseigneur, speak no more such words! They bewilder me. I am culpable in having wished to serve you without foreseeing how far my advances might lead. I love you, in reality, as a tender friend, and as a friend I am grateful for your delicate attentions; but, alas! alas! you will never find a mistress in me."

"Marchioness!" cried Fouquet, in a tone of despair, "why not?"

"Because you are too much beloved," said the young woman, in a low voice; "because you are too much beloved by too many people; because the splendor of glory and fortune wound my eyes, while the darkness of sorrow attracts them; because, in short, I, who have repulsed you in your proud magnificence, — I, who scarcely looked at you in your splendor, — I came, like a mad woman, to throw myself as it were into your arms, when

I saw a misfortune hovering over your head. You understand me now, Monseigneur? Become happy again, that I may again become chaste in heart and in thought. Your misfortunes would ruin me!"

"Oh, Madame," said Fouquet, with an emotion he had never before felt, "were I to fall to the last degree of human misery, and should I hear from your mouth that word which you now refuse me, that day, Madame, you will be mistaken in your noble egotism; that day you will fancy you are consoling the most unfortunate of men, and you will have said *I love you* to the most illustrious, the most delighted, the most triumphant of the happy beings of this world."

He was still at her feet, kissing her hand, when Pellisson entered precipitately, exclaiming, in very ill humor, "Monseigneur! Madame! for heaven's sake! excuse me. Monseigneur, you have been here half an hour. Oh, do not both look at me so reproachfully! Madame, pray who is that lady who left your house soon after Monseigneur came in?"

"Madame Vanel," said Fouquet.

"There!" cried Pellisson, "I was sure of it."

"Well! what then?"

"Why, she got into her carriage looking deadly pale."

"Of what consequence is that to me?"

"Yes; but what she said to her coachman is of consequence to you."

"Oh, heavens!" cried the marchioness, "what was that?"

"'To M. Colbert's'!" said Pellisson, in a hoarse voice.

"Good heavens! go, Monseigneur, go!" replied the marchioness, pushing Fouquet out of the salon, while Pellisson dragged him by the hand.

"Am I, then, indeed," said the superintendent, "become a child, to be frightened by a shadow?"

"You are a giant," said the marchioness, "whom a viper is endeavoring to bite on the heel."

Pellisson continued to drag Fouquet on to the carriage.

"To the Palais at full speed!" cried Pellisson to the coachman.

The horses set off like lightning; no obstacle retarded their pace for an instant. Only at the Arcade St. Jean, as they were coming out upon the Place de Grève, a long file of horsemen, barring the narrow passage, stopped the superintendent's carriage. There was no means of forcing this barrier; it was necessary to wait till the mounted archers of the watch — for it was they who stopped the way — had passed with the heavy carriage they were escorting, and which ascended rapidly towards the Place Baudoyer. Fouquet and Pellisson took no further account of this circumstance beyond deploring the minute's delay they had to submit to. They entered the lodge of the *concierge* of the palace five minutes after.

That officer was still walking about in the front court. At the name of Fouquet, whispered in his ear by Pellisson, the governor eagerly approached the carriage, and, hat in hand, was profuse in his obeisances. "What an honor for me, Monseigneur!" said he.

"One word, Monsieur the Governor! Will you take the trouble to get into my carriage?" The officer placed himself opposite Fouquet in the coach. "Monsieur," said Fouquet, "I have a service to ask of you."

"Speak, Monseigneur!"

"A service which will compromise you, Monsieur, but which will assure to you forever my protection and my friendship."

"Were it to cast myself into the fire for you, Monseigneur, I would do it."

"Well," said Fouquet, "what I require is much more simple."

"That being so, Monseigneur, what is it?"

"To conduct me to the chamber of Messieurs Lyodot and d'Eymeris."

"Will Monseigneur have the kindness to say for what purpose?"

"I will tell you in their presence, Monsieur, at the same time that I will give you ample means of palliating this escape."

"Escape! Why, then, Monseigneur does not know?"

"What?"

"That Messieurs Lyodot and d'Eymeris are no longer here."

"Since when?" cried Fouquet, in great agitation.

"About a quarter of an hour."

"Whither have they gone, then?"

"To Vincennes, — to the donjon."

"Who took them from here?"

"An order from the king."

"Oh! woe! woe!" exclaimed Fouquet, striking his forehead; and without saying a single word more to the governor, he threw himself back in his carriage, despair in his heart and death on his countenance.

"Well!" said Pellisson, with great anxiety.

"Our friends are lost. Colbert is conveying them to the donjon. It was they who crossed our passage under the Arcade St. Jean."

Pellisson, struck as with a thunderbolt, made no reply. With a single reproach he would have killed his master.

"Where is Monseigneur going?" inquired the footman.

"Home, to Paris. — You, Pellisson, return to St. Mandé, and bring the Abbé Fouquet to me within an hour. Go!"

CHAPTER XII.

PLAN OF BATTLE.

The night was already far advanced when the Abbé Fouquet joined his brother. Gourville had accompanied him. These three men, pale with apprehension, resembled less three powers of that period than three conspirators, united by one and the same thought of violence.

Fouquet walked back and forth for a long time, with his eyes fixed upon the floor, striking his hands one against the other. At length, taking courage, in the midst of a deep, long sigh, "Abbé," said he, "you were speaking to me, only to-day, of certain people you maintain?"

"Yes, Monsieur," replied the abbé.

"Tell me precisely who these people are." The abbé hesitated. "Come! no fear, I am not threatening; no romancing, I am not joking."

"Since you demand the truth, Monseigneur, here it is: I have a hundred and twenty friends, or companions of pleasure, who are devoted to me as the thief is to the gallows."

"And you think you can depend upon them?"

"Entirely."

"And you will not compromise yourself?"

"I will not even make my appearance."

"And are they men of resolution?"

"They would burn Paris, if I promised them they should not be burned in turn."

"The thing I ask of you, Abbé," said Fouquet, wiping the sweat which fell from his brow, "is to throw your hundred and twenty men upon the people I will point out to you, at a certain appointed moment. Is it possible?"

"It will not be the first time such a thing has happened to them, Monseigneur."

"That is well; but would these bandits attack an armed force?"

"They are used to that."

"Then get your hundred and twenty men together, Abbé."

"Directly. But where?"

"On the road to Vincennes, to-morrow, at two o'clock, precisely."

"To carry off Lyodot and D'Eymeris? There will be blows to receive!"

"A number, no doubt; are you afraid?"

"Not for myself, but for you."

"Your men will know, then, what they have to do?"

"They are too intelligent not to guess it. Now, a minister who gets up a riot against his king exposes himself—"

"Of what importance is that to you, if I pay for it? Besides, if I fall, you fall with me."

"It would then be more prudent, Monsieur, not to stir in the affair, and leave the king to take this little satisfaction."

"Think well of this, Abbé. Lyodot and D'Eymeris at Vincennes are a prelude of ruin for my house. I repeat it, — I arrested, you will be imprisoned; I imprisoned, you will be exiled."

"Monsieur, I am at your orders; have you any to give me?"

"What I told you, — I wish that, to-morrow, the two

financiers of whom they mean to make victims while there remain so many criminals unpunished, should be snatched from the fury of my enemies. Take your measures accordingly. Is it possible?"

"It is possible."

"Describe your plan."

"It is of rich simplicity. The ordinary guard at executions consists of twelve archers."

"There will be a hundred to-morrow."

"I reckon so. I even say more, — there will be two hundred."

"Then your hundred and twenty men will not be enough."

"Pardon me. In every crowd composed of a hundred thousand spectators, there are ten thousand bandits or cutpurses; only, they dare not take the initiative."

"Well?"

"There will then be, to-morrow, on the Place de Grève, which I choose as my battle-field, ten thousand auxiliaries to my hundred and twenty men. The attack began by the latter, the others will finish it."

"That all appears feasible; but what will be done with regard to the prisoners upon the Place de Grève?"

"This: they must be thrust into some house on the Place, — that will make a siege necessary to get them out again. And stop! here is another idea, more sublime still: some houses have two exits — one upon the Place, and the other into the Rue de la Mortellerie, or de la Vannerie, or de la Tixeranderie. The prisoners, entering by one door, will go out at another."

"Yes; but fix upon something positive."

"I am seeking to do so."

"And I," exclaimed Fouquet, — "I have found it. Listen to what has occurred to me at this moment."

"I am listening."

Fouquet made a sign to Gourville, who appeared to understand. "One of my friends lends me sometimes the keys of a house which he rents, in the Rue Baudoyer, the spacious gardens of which extend behind a certain house of the Place de Grève."

"That is the place for us," said the abbé. "What house?"

"A pot-house, pretty well frequented, whose sign represents the image of Notre-Dame."

"I know it," said the abbé.

"This pot-house has windows opening upon the Place, a place of exit into the court, which must abut upon the gardens of my friend by a door of communication."

"Good!" said the abbé.

"Enter by the pot-house; take the prisoners in; defend the door while you enable them to escape by the garden and the Place Baudoyer."

"That is all plain. Monsieur, you would make an excellent general, like the prince."

"Have you understood me?"

"Perfectly."

"How much will it take to make your bandits all drunk with wine, and to satisfy them with gold?"

"Oh, Monsieur, what an expression! Oh, Monsieur, if they heard you! Some of them are very susceptible."

"I mean to say they must be made no longer to know the heavens from the earth: for I shall to-morrow contend with the king; and when I fight I mean to conquer, — please to understand."

"It shall be done, Monsieur. Give me your other ideas."

"The rest is your business."

"Then give me your purse."

"Gourville, count out a hundred thousand livres for the abbé!"

"Good! and do not be at all sparing, did you not say?"

"You are right."

"So much the better."

"Monseigneur," objected Gourville, "if this should be known, we should lose our heads."

"Eh! Gourville," replied Fouquet, purple with anger, "you excite my pity. Speak for yourself, if you please. My head does not shake in that manner upon my shoulders. Now, Abbé, is everything arranged?"

"Everything."

"At two o'clock to-morrow."

"At twelve, because it will be necessary to prepare our auxiliaries in a secret manner."

"That is true; do not spare the innkeeper's wine."

"I will spare neither his wine nor his house," replied the abbé, with a sneering laugh. "I have my plan, I tell you; leave me to set it in operation, and you shall see."

"Where shall you be yourself?"

"Everywhere; nowhere."

"And how shall I receive information?"

"By a courier, whose horse shall be kept in the very garden of your friend. By the way, the name of your friend?"

Fouquet looked again at Gourville. The latter came to the aid of his master, saying, "Accompany Monsieur the Abbé for several reasons. However, the house is easily found, — the 'Image de Notre-Dame' in the front; a garden, the only one in the quarter, behind."

"Good! good! I will go and give notice to my soldiers."

"Accompany him, Gourville," said Fouquet, "and count him down the money! One moment, Abbé, — one

moment, Gourville, — what name will be given to this carrying off?"

"A very natural one, Monsieur, — the riot."

"The riot on account of what? For if ever the people of Paris are disposed to pay their court to the king, it is when he hangs financiers."

"I will manage that," said the abbé.

"Yes; but you may manage it badly, and people will guess."

"Not at all, not at all. I have another idea."

"What is that?"

"My men shall cry out, 'Colbert! *vive* Colbert!' and shall throw themselves upon the prisoners as if they would tear them in pieces, and shall drag them from the gibbets, as too mild a punishment."

"Ah, that is truly an idea!" said Gourville. "*Peste!* Monsieur the Abbé, what an imagination you have!"

"Monsieur, we are worthy of our family," returned the abbé, proudly.

"Strange fellow!" murmured Fouquet. Then he added: "That is ingenious. Carry it out, but shed no blood."

Gourville and the abbé went off together, with their heads full of the meditated riot. The superintendent lay down upon some cushions, partly thinking over the sinister projects of the morrow, partly dreaming of love.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE POT-HOUSE OF THE IMAGE DE NOTRE-DAME.

At two o'clock the next day fifty thousand spectators had taken their position upon the Place around the two gibbets which had been elevated between the Quai de la Grève and the Quai Pelletier, — one close to the other, with their backs to the parapet of the river. In the morning, also, all the sworn criers of the good city of Paris had traversed the quarters of the city, particularly the markets and the outskirts, announcing with their hoarse and untiring voices the great justice to be done by the king upon two peculators, two thieves, devourers of the people. And these people, whose interests were so warmly looked after, in order not to fail in respect to their king, left shops, stalls, and workrooms, to go and evince a little gratitude to Louis XIV., — for all the world like invited guests who fear to commit an incivility in not repairing to the house of him who invited them. According to the tenor of the sentence, which the criers read loudly and badly, two farmers of the revenues, monopolizers of money, wasters of the royal funds, extortioners and forgers, were about to undergo capital punishment on the Place de Grève, "with their names placed over their heads." As to those names, the sentence made no mention of them. The curiosity of the Parisians was at its height ; and, as we have said, an immense crowd awaited with feverish impatience the hour fixed for the execution. The news had already spread that the prisoners,

transferred to the Château of Vincennes, would be conducted from that prison to the Place de Grève. Consequently the Faubourg and the Rue St. Antoine were crowded; for the population of Paris in those days of great executions was divided into two classes, — those who came to see the condemned pass by (these were timid and mild hearts, but curious in philosophy), and those who wished to see the condemned die (these were hearts eager for emotion).

On this day M. d'Artagnan, having received his last instructions from the king and made his adieus to his friends, the number of whom was at the moment reduced to Planchet, was planning out his day's work, like a man who counts his minutes and appreciates their importance.

"My departure is to be," said he, "at break of day, three o'clock in the morning. I have, then, fifteen hours before me. Take from them the six hours of sleep which are indispensable for me, — six; one hour for meals, — seven; one hour for a farewell visit to Athos, — eight; two hours for chance circumstances, — total, ten. There are then five hours left. One hour to get my money, — that is, to have it refused me by M. Fouquet; another hour to go and receive my money of M. Colbert, together with his questions and grimaces; one hour to look over my clothes and my arms, and get my boots oiled. I have still two hours left. *Mordioux!* how rich I am!" And so saying, D'Artagnan felt a strange joy — a joy of youth, a perfume of those great and happy years of former times — mount to his brain and intoxicate him. "During those two hours I will go," said the musketeer, "and collect my quarter's rent of the Image de Notre-Dame. That will be pleasant! Three hundred and seventy-five livres! *Mordioux!* but that is astonishing! If the poor man who has but one livre in his pocket,

found a livre and twelve deniers, that would be justice, that would be excellent; but to the poor man such a windfall does not come. The rich man, on the contrary, makes himself revenues with his money, which he does not touch. Here are three hundred and seventy-five livres which fall to me from heaven. I will go, then, to the Image de Notre-Dame, and drink a glass of Spanish wine with my tenant, which he cannot fail to offer me. But order must be observed, M. d'Artagnan, — order must be observed! Let us organize our time, therefore, and distribute the employment of it: Art. 1, Athos; Art. 2, the Image de Notre-Dame; Art. 3, M. Fouquet; Art. 4, M. Colbert; Art. 5, supper; Art. 6, clothes, boots, horse, portmanteau; Art. 7 and last, sleep."

In accordance with this programme, D'Artagnan then went straight to the Comte de la Fère, to whom modestly and ingenuously he related a part of his fortunate adventures. Athos had not been without uneasiness on the subject of D'Artagnan's visit to the king; but a few words sufficed as an explanation of that. Athos divined that Louis had charged D'Artagnan with some important mission, and did not even make an effort to draw the secret from him. He only recommended him to take care of himself, and offered discreetly to accompany him, if that were desirable.

"But, my dear friend," said D'Artagnan, "I am going nowhere."

"What! you come to bid me adieu, and are going nowhere?"

"Oh! yes, yes," replied D'Artagnan, coloring a little, "I am going to make a purchase."

"That is quite another thing. Then I change my formula. Instead of 'Do not get yourself killed,' I will say, 'Do not get yourself robbed.'"

"My friend, I will inform you if I cast my eye upon any property that pleases me, and I shall expect you to favor me with your opinion."

"Yes, yes," said Athos, too delicate to permit himself even the consolation of a smile. Raoul imitated the paternal reserve. But D'Artagnan thought it would appear too mysterious to leave his friends under a pretence, without even telling them the route he was about to take.

"I have chosen Le Mans," said he to Athos. "Is it a good country?"

"Excellent, my friend," replied the count, without calling to his notice that Le Mans was in the same direction as La Touraine, and that by waiting two days at most, he might travel with a friend. But D'Artagnan, more embarrassed than the count, sank, at every explanation, deeper into the mud, into which he fell by degrees. "I shall set out to-morrow at daybreak," said he, at last. "Till that time, will you come with me, Raoul?"

"Yes, Monsieur the Chevalier," said the young man, "if Monsieur the Count does not want me."

"No, Raoul; I am to have an audience to-day of Monsieur, the king's brother."

Raoul asked Grimaud for his sword, which the old man brought him immediately.

"Now, then," added D'Artagnan, opening his arms to Athos, "adieu, my dear friend!" Athos held him in a long embrace; and the musketeer, who knew his discretion so well, murmured in his ear, "An affair of State," to which Athos only replied by a pressure of the hand, still more significant. They then separated.

Raoul took the arm of his old friend, who led him along the Rue St. Honoré. "I am conducting you to the abode of the god Plutus," said D'Artagnan to the young man;

"prepare yourself. All day long you will witness the piling up of crowns. Good God! how am I changed!"

"What numbers of people there are in the street!" said Raoul.

"Is there a procession to-day?" inquired D'Artagnan of a lounger.

"Monsieur, it is a hanging," replied the passer-by.

"What! a hanging at the Grève?" said D'Artagnan.

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Devil take the rogue who gets himself hung the day I want to go and collect my rent!" exclaimed D'Artagnan. "Raoul, did you ever see anybody hung?"

"Never, Monsieur, thank God!"

"Oh, how young that sounds! If you were on guard in the trenches, as I was, and a spy — But, look you, Raoul, pardon me, I am doting, — you are quite right; it is a hideous sight to see a person hung! At what hour do they hang, Monsieur, if you please?"

"Monsieur," replied the stranger, respectfully, delighted at joining conversation with two men of the sword, "it will take place about three o'clock."

"It is now only half-past one; let us lengthen our steps. We shall be there in time to collect my three hundred and seventy-five livres, and get away before the arrival of the malefactor."

"Malefactors, Monsieur," continued the citizen; "there are two of them."

"Monsieur, I thank you very much," said D'Artagnan, who, as he grew older, had become polite to the last degree.

Drawing Raoul along, he directed his course rapidly in the direction of La Grève. Without that great experience which musketeers have of a crowd, to which were joined an irresistible strength of wrist and an uncommon suppleness of shoulders, our two travellers would

not have arrived at their destination. They followed the line of the quay, which they had reached on leaving the Rue St. Honoré, where they had taken leave of Athos. D'Artagnan went first; his elbow, his wrist, his shoulder, formed three wedges which he knew how to insinuate with skill into the groups, to make them split and separate like pieces of wood. He often made use of the hilt of his sword as an additional help; introducing it between ribs that were too rebellious, making it take the part of a lever or crowbar, to separate husband from wife, uncle from nephew, and brother from brother. And all this was done so naturally, and with such gracious smiles, that people must have had ribs of bronze not to cry, "Thank you!" when the hilt played about them; or hearts of adamant not to be enchanted when the bland smile beamed upon the lips of the musketeer. Raoul, following his friend, cajoled the women, who admired his beauty; pushed back the men, who felt the rigidity of his muscles; and both made their way, thanks to these manœuvres, among the rather compact mass of the populace.

They arrived in sight of the two gibbets, from which Raoul turned away his eyes in disgust. As for D'Artagnan, he did not even see them: his house, with its serrated gable, its windows crowded with the curious, attracted and even absorbed all the attention he was capable of. He distinguished, in the Place and around the houses, a large number of musketeers on leave, who, some with women, others with friends, awaited the moment of the ceremony. What rejoiced him above all was to see that his tenant, the innkeeper, was so busy he did not know which way to turn. Three lads could not supply the drinkers. They filled the shop, the chambers, and the court even.

D'Artagnan called Raoul's attention to this concourse,

adding: "The fellow will have no excuse for not paying his rent. Look at those drinkers, Raoul; one would say they were jolly companions. *Mordioux!* why, there is no room anywhere!" D'Artagnan, however, contrived to catch hold of the master by the corner of his apron, and to make himself known to him.

"Ah, Monsieur the Chevalier!" said the innkeeper, half distracted, "one minute, if you please; I have here a hundred madmen turning my cellar upside down."

"The cellar, if you like, but not the money-box."

"Oh, Monsieur, your thirty-seven and a half pistoles are all counted out ready for you, upstairs in my chamber; but there are in that chamber thirty customers, who are sucking the staves of a little barrel of Oporto which I tapped for them this morning. Give me a minute, — only a minute!"

"Very well, very well."

"I am going," said Raoul, in a low voice, to D'Artagnan; "this hilarity is vile!"

"Monsieur," replied D'Artagnan, sternly, "you will please to remain where you are. The soldier ought to familiarize himself with all kinds of spectacles. There are in the eye, when it is young, fibres which we must learn how to harden; and we are not truly generous and good but from the moment when the eye has become hardened and the heart remains tender. Besides, my little Raoul, would you leave me alone here? That would be very unkind in you. Look! there is yonder, in the lower court, a tree, and under the shade of that tree we shall breathe more freely than in this hot atmosphere of spilt wine."

From the spot on which they had placed themselves, the two new guests of the Image de Notre-Dame heard the ever-increasing murmurs of the tide of people, and

lost neither a shout nor a gesture of the drinkers at tables in the drinking-room or scattered through the chambers. If D'Artagnan had wished to place himself as a scout for a reconnoissance, he could not have succeeded better. The tree under which he and Raoul were seated covered them with its already thick foliage; it was a low, thick chestnut-tree, with drooping branches, which cast their shade over a table so broken that the drinkers had abandoned it. We said that from this post D'Artagnan saw everything. He observed the goings and comings of the waiters; the arrival of fresh drinkers; the welcome, sometimes friendly, sometimes hostile, given to certain newcomers by certain others that were installed there. He observed all this to amuse himself, for the thirty-seven and a half pistoles were a long time coming. Raoul recalled his attention to it. "Monsieur," said he, "you do not hurry your tenant, and the condemned will soon be here. There will then be such a press, we shall not be able to get out."

"You are right," said the musketeer.—"Holloa! somebody there! *Mordioux!*" But it was in vain he shouted and knocked upon the wreck of the table, which fell to pieces beneath his fist; nobody came.

D'Artagnan was preparing to go and find the innkeeper himself, to force him to a definite explanation, when the door of the court in which he was with Raoul, a door which communicated with the garden situated at the back, opened, creaking painfully on its rusted hinges, and a man dressed as a cavalier, with his sword in the sheath but not at his belt, came out of the garden, crossed the court without closing the door, and having cast a glance at D'Artagnan and his companion, proceeded towards the tavern itself, looking about in all directions, with eyes capable of piercing walls or consciences. "Humph!"

said D'Artagnan, "my tenants are consulting. That, no doubt, now, is some amateur in matters of hanging." At the same moment the shouts and uproar of the drinkers in the upper chambers ceased. Silence, under such circumstances, surprises more than a twofold increase of noise. D'Artagnan wished to see what was the cause of this sudden silence. He then perceived that this man, dressed as a cavalier, had just entered the principal chamber, and was haranguing the tipplers, who all listened to him with the greatest attention. D'Artagnan would perhaps have heard his speech but for the overpowering noise of the popular clamors, which made a formidable accompaniment to the harangue of the orator. But it was soon finished; and all the people the house contained came out, one after the other, in little groups, so that there remained only six in the chamber. One of these six, the man with the sword, took the innkeeper aside, engaging him in conversation more or less serious; while the others lit a great fire in the chimney-place, — a circumstance rendered strange by the fine weather and the heat.

"It is very singular," said D'Artagnan to Raoul, "but I think I know those faces yonder."

"Don't you think you can smell the smoke here?" said Raoul.

"I rather think I can smell a conspiracy," replied D'Artagnan.

He had not finished speaking, when four of these men came down into the court, and without the appearance of any bad design mounted guard at the door of communication, casting at intervals glances at D'Artagnan, which signified many things.

"*Mordioux!*" said D'Artagnan, in a low voice, "there is something going on. Are you curious, Raoul?"

"According to the subject, Chevalier."

"Well, I am as curious as an old woman. Come a little more in front; we shall get a better view of the place. I would lay a wager that view will be somewhat interesting."

"But you know, Monsieur the Chevalier, that I am not willing to become a passive and indifferent spectator of the death of the two poor fellows."

"And I, then! — do you think I am a savage? We will go in again when it is time to do so. Come along!" And they made their way towards the front of the house, and placed themselves near the window, which, still more strange than anything else, remained unoccupied.

The last two drinkers, instead of looking out at this window, kept up the fire. On seeing D'Artagnan and his friend enter, "Ah! ah! a reinforcement," murmured they.

D'Artagnan jogged Raoul's elbow. "Yes, my braves, a reinforcement," said he. "*Cordieu!* there is a famous fire. Whom are you going to cook?"

The two men uttered a shout of jovial laughter, and instead of answering, threw on more wood. D'Artagnan could not take his eyes off them.

"I suppose," said one of the fire-makers, "they sent you to tell us the time, — did they not?"

"Certainly," said D'Artagnan, anxious to know what was going on; "why should I be here else, if it were not for that?"

"Then place yourself at the window, if you please, and watch."

D'Artagnan smiled under his mustache, made a sign to Raoul, and stationed himself complacently at the window.

CHAPTER XIV.

VIVE COLBERT !

The spectacle which the Grève now presented was a frightful one. The heads, levelled by the perspective, extended afar, thick and agitated as the ears of corn in a vast plain. From time to time a fresh report or a distant rumor made the heads oscillate and thousands of eyes flash. Now and then there were great movements. All those ears of corn bent, and became waves more agitated than those of the ocean, which rolled from the extremities to the centre, and beat, like the tides, against the hedge of archers who surrounded the gibbets. Then the handles of the halberds were let fall upon the heads and shoulders of the rash invaders; at times, also, it was the steel as well as the wood, and in that case a large empty circle was formed around the guard, — a space won at the expense of the extremities, which underwent in their turn the compression of the sudden movement, which drove them against the parapets of the Seine. From the window, which commanded a view of the whole Place, D'Artagnan saw, with inward satisfaction, that such of the musketeers and guards as found themselves involved in the crowd were able, with blows of their fists and the hilts of their swords, to keep room. He even noticed that they had succeeded, by that *esprit de corps* which doubles the strength of the soldier, in getting together in one group to the amount of about fifty men; and that, with the exception of a dozen stragglers whom he still saw rolling about here and there, the nucleus was com-

plete, and within reach of his voice. But it was not the musketeers and guards only that drew the attention of D'Artagnan. Around the gibbets, and particularly at the entrances to the Arcade of St. Jean, moved a noisy mass, a busy mass; daring faces, resolute demeanors, were to be seen here and there, mingled with silly faces and indifferent demeanors; signals were interchanged, hands given and taken. D'Artagnan remarked among the groups, and those groups the most animated, the face of the cavalier whom he had seen enter by the door of communication from his garden, and who had gone upstairs to harangue the drinkers. That man was organizing squads and giving orders. "*Mordioux!*" said D'Artagnan to himself, "I was not deceived; I know that man, — it is Menneville. What the devil is he doing here?"

A distant murmur, which became more distinct by degrees, put an end to this reflection, and drew his attention another way. This murmur was occasioned by the arrival of the culprits; a strong picket of archers preceded them, and appeared at the angle of the arcade. The entire crowd now joined as if in one cry; all the cries, united, formed one immense howl. D'Artagnan saw Raoul turning pale, and he slapped him roughly on the shoulder. The fire-keepers turned round on hearing the great cry, and asked what was going on.

"The condemned have arrived," said D'Artagnan.

"That is well," replied they, again replenishing the fire.

D'Artagnan looked at them with much uneasiness; it was evident that those men who were making such a fire for no apparent purpose had some strange intentions. The condemned appeared upon the Place. They were walking, the executioner before them, while fifty archers formed a hedge on their right and their left. Both were dressed in black; they appeared pale but firm. They

looked impatiently over the people's heads, standing on tiptoe at every step.

D'Artagnan noticed this. "*Mordioux !*" said he, "they are in a great hurry to get a sight of the gibbet !"

Raoul drew back, without, however, having the power to leave the window. Terror even has its attractions.

"To the death ! to the death !" cried fifty thousand voices.

"Yes, to the death !" howled a hundred others, as if the great mass had furnished them the response.

"To the halter ! to the halter !" cried the great whole ; "*Vive le Roi !*"

"Well," said D'Artagnan, "this is droll ; I thought it was M. Colbert who had caused them to be hung."

There was at this moment a great rolling movement in the crowd, which stopped for a moment the march of the condemned. The men of bold and resolute mien whom D'Artagnan had observed, by dint of pressing, pushing, and lifting themselves up, had succeeded in almost touching the hedge of archers. The *cortége* resumed its march. All at once, to cries of "*Vive* Colbert !" those men, of whom D'Artagnan never lost sight, fell upon the escort, which in vain endeavored to stand against them. Behind these men was the crowd. Then began, amid a frightful tumult, as frightful a confusion. This time there was something more than cries of expectation or cries of mirth ; there were cries of pain. Halberds struck men down, swords ran them through, muskets were discharged at them. The turmoil then became so great that D'Artagnan could no longer distinguish anything. Then from this chaos suddenly surged something like a visible intention, like a purpose formed. The condemned had been torn from the hands of the guards, and were being dragged towards the house of the Image de

Notre-Dame. Those who dragged them shouted "*Vive* Colbert!" The people hesitated, not knowing which they ought to fall upon, the archers or the aggressors. What stopped the people was, that those who cried "*Vive* Colbert!" began to cry, at the same time, "No halter! down with the gibbet! to the fire! to the fire! burn the thieves! burn the extortioners!" This cry, shouted as with one voice, was enthusiastically received. The populace had come to witness an execution, and here was an opportunity offered them of performing one themselves. This would of course be more agreeable to the populace; therefore they ranged themselves immediately on the side of the aggressors against the archers, crying with the minority, which had become, thanks to them, the most compact majority: "Yes, yes; to the fire with the thieves! *Vive* Colbert!"

"*Mordioux!*" exclaimed D'Artagnan, "this begins to look serious."

One of the men who remained near the chimney approached the window, a firebrand in his hand. "Ah!" said he, "it is getting warm." Then, turning to his companion, "There is the signal," added he; and he immediately applied the burning brand to the wainscoting.

Now, this tavern of the Image de Notre-Dame was not a very newly built house, and therefore the fire did not require much coaxing. In a second the boards began to crackle, and the flames arose sparkling to the ceiling. A howling from without replied to the shouts of the incendiaries. D'Artagnan, who had seen nothing of this, having been looking out upon the Place, felt, at the same time, the smoke which choked him and the fire which scorched him. "Holloa!" cried he, turning round, "is the fire here? Are you drunk or mad, my masters?"

The two men looked at each other with an air of aston-

ishment. "Why," asked they of D'Artagnan, "was it not a thing agreed upon?"

"A thing agreed upon that you should burn my house!" vociferated D'Artagnan, snatching the brand from the hand of the incendiary, and striking him with it across the face. The second wanted to come to the assistance of his comrade; but Raoul, seizing him by the middle, threw him out of the window, while D'Artagnan pushed his man down the stairs. Raoul, first disengaged, tore the burning wainscoting down, and threw it smoking out of the chamber. At a glance D'Artagnan saw there was nothing to be feared from the fire, and sprang to the window.

The disorder was at its height. The air was filled with simultaneous cries of "To the fire!" "To the death!" "To the halter!" "To the stake!" "*Vive* Colbert!" "*Vive le Roi!*" The group which had forced the culprits from the hands of the archers had drawn close to the house, which appeared to be the goal towards which they were dragging them. Menneville was at the head of this group, shouting louder than any one, "To the fire! to the fire! *Vive* Colbert!"

D'Artagnan began to comprehend. They wanted to burn the condemned, and his house was to serve as a funeral pile. "Halt there!" cried he, sword in hand, and one foot upon the window-sill. "Menneville, what do you want to do?"

"M. d'Artagnan!" cried the latter; "give way, give way!"

"To the fire! to the fire with the thieves! *Vive* Colbert!" yelled the crowd.

These cries exasperated D'Artagnan. "*Mordioux!*" said he. "What! burn the poor devils who are only condemned to be hung! that is infamous!"

Before the door, however, the mass of anxious spectators, rolled back against the walls, had become thicker and closed up the way. Menneville and his men, who were dragging along the culprits, were within ten paces of the door.

Menneville made a last effort. "Make way! make way!" cried he, pistol in hand.

"Burn them! burn them!" repeated the crowd. "The Image de Notre-Dame is on fire! Burn the thieves! burn the monopolists in the Image de Notre-Dame!"

There now remained no doubt; it was plainly D'Artagnan's house that was their object. D'Artagnan remembered the old cry, always so effective from his mouth. "To me, Musketeers!" shouted he, with the voice of a giant, with one of those voices which predominate over cannon, the sea, the tempest; "To me, Musketeers!" And suspending himself by the arm from the balcony, he allowed himself to drop in the middle of the crowd, which began to draw back from a house that rained men. Raoul was on the ground as soon as he, both with sword in hand. All the musketeers on the Place heard that mustering cry; all turned at that cry and recognized D'Artagnan. "To the captain, to the captain!" shouted they, in their turn; and the crowd opened before them as if before the prow of a vessel.

At that moment D'Artagnan and Menneville found themselves face to face.

"Make way! make way!" cried Menneville, seeing that he was within an arm's length of the door.

"No one passes here," said D'Artagnan.

"Take that, then!" said Menneville, firing his pistol, almost within touch. But before the cock had dropped, D'Artagnan had struck up Menneville's arm with the hilt of his sword, and passed the blade through his body.

"I told you plainly to keep yourself quiet," said D'Artagnan to Menneville, who rolled at his feet.

"Make way ! make way !" cried the companions of Menneville, at first terrified, but soon recovering, when they perceived they had to do with only two men. But those two men are hundred-armed giants; the sword flies about in their hands like the flaming brand of the archangel. It pierces with its point, strikes with its back, cuts with its edge ; every stroke brings down its man.

"For the king !" cried D'Artagnan, to every man he struck at, — that is to say, to every man that fell.

"For the king !" repeated Raoul.

This cry became the watchword for the musketeers, who, guided by it, joined D'Artagnan. During this time the archers, recovering from the panic they had undergone, charge the aggressors in the rear, and, regular as mill-strokes, overturn or knock down all that oppose them. The crowd, which sees swords gleaming and drops of blood flying in the air, — the crowd falls back, and crushes itself. At length cries for mercy and of despair resound ; that is the farewell of the vanquished. The two condemned men are again in the hands of the archers.

D'Artagnan approaches them, and seeing them pale and sinking, "Console yourselves, poor men !" said he ; "you will not undergo the frightful torture with which these wretches threatened you. The king has condemned you to be hung, — you shall only be hung. Go on, hang them, and it will all be over."

There is no longer anything going on at the Image de Notre-Dame. The fire has been extinguished with two tuns of wine in default of water. The conspirators have fled by the garden. The archers are dragging the culprits to the gibbets.

From this moment the affair did not occupy much

time. The executioner, heedless about operating according to the rules of art, made such haste that he despatched the two wretches in one minute.

In the mean time the people gathered around D'Artagnan. They congratulated, they cheered him. He wiped his brow, streaming with sweat, and his sword, streaming with blood. He shrugged his shoulders at seeing Menneville writhing at his feet in the last convulsions; and while Raoul turned away his eyes in compassion, he pointed out to the musketeers the gibbets laden with their melancholy fruit. "Poor devils!" said he, "I hope they died blessing me, for I saved them narrowly." These words caught the ear of Menneville just as he was breathing his last sigh. A dark, ironical smile flitted across his lips; he wished to reply, but the effort hastened the snapping of the cord of life, — he expired.

"Oh, all this is frightful!" murmured Raoul; "let us go, Monsieur the Chevalier."

"You are not wounded?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Not at all; thank you."

"That is well! Thou art a brave fellow, *mordioux!* The head of the father, and the arm of Porthos! Ah! if he had been here, that Porthos, you would have seen something worth looking at."

Then, as if by way of remembrance, "But where the devil can that brave Porthos be?" murmured D'Artagnan.

"Come, Chevalier, pray come!" urged Raoul.

"One minute, my friend; let me take my thirty-seven and a half pistoles, and I shall be at your service. The house is a good property," added D'Artagnan, as he entered the Image de Notre-Dame; "but decidedly, even if it were less profitable, I should prefer its being in another quarter."

CHAPTER XV.

HOW THE DIAMOND OF M. D'EYMERIS PASSED INTO THE HANDS OF M. D'ARTAGNAN.

While this violent and bloody scene was passing on the Grève, several men, barricaded behind the gate of communication with the garden, replaced their swords in their sheaths, assisted one among them to mount a ready-saddled horse which was waiting in the garden, and, like a flock of frightened birds, fled away in all directions, some climbing the walls, others rushing out at the gates, with all the fury of a panic. He who mounted the horse, and who gave him the spur so sharply that the animal was near leaping the wall, — this cavalier, we say, crossed the Place Baudoyer, passed like lightning before the crowd in the streets, riding against, running over, and knocking down all that came in his way, and, ten minutes after, arrived at the house of the superintendent, even more out of breath than his horse.

The Abbé Fouquet, at the clatter of the hoofs on the pavement, appeared at a window of the court, and before even the cavalier had set foot to the ground, "Well, Danicamp?" he inquired, leaning half out at the window.

"Well, it is all over," replied the cavalier.

"All over!" cried the abbé; "then they are saved?"

"No, Monsieur," replied the cavalier, "they are hanged."

"Hanged!" repeated the abbé, turning pale. A side door suddenly opened, and Fouquet appeared in the chamber, pale, distracted, with lips half opened, groaning

with grief and anger. He stopped upon the threshold to listen to what was addressed from the court to the window.

"Miserable wretches!" said the abbé, "you did not fight, then?"

"Like lions."

"Say like cowards."

"Monsieur!"

"A hundred men accustomed to war, sword in hand, are worth ten thousand archers in a surprise. Where is Menneville, that boaster, that braggart, who was to return conqueror or die?"

"Well, Monsieur, he has kept his word; he is dead!"

"Dead! Who killed him?"

"A demon disguised as a man, a giant armed with ten flaming swords, a madman, who at one blow extinguished the fire, extinguished the riot, and caused a hundred musketeers to rise up out of the pavement of the Place de Grève."

Fouquet raised his brow, streaming with sweat, murmuring, "Oh! Lyodot and D'Eymeris! dead! dead! dead! and I dishonored!"

The abbé turned round, and perceiving his brother crushed and livid, "Come, come," said he, "it is a blow of fate, Monsieur; we must not lament thus. If we have not succeeded, it is because God —"

"Be silent, Abbé! be silent!" cried Fouquet; "your excuses are blasphemies. Order that man up here, and let him relate the details of this horrible event."

"But, Brother —"

"Obey, Monsieur!"

The abbé made a sign, and in half a minute the step of the man was heard upon the stairs. At the same time Gourville appeared behind Fouquet, like the guardian angel of the superintendent, pressing one finger upon his

lips to enjoin circumspection even amid the burst of his grief. The minister resumed all the serenity that human strength could leave at the disposal of a heart half broken with sorrow. Danicamp appeared.

"Make your report," said Gourville.

"Monsieur," replied the messenger, "we received orders to carry off the prisoners, and to cry '*Vive* Colbert!' while carrying them off."

"To burn them alive, was it not, Abbé?" interrupted Gourville.

"Yes, yes; the order was given to Menneville. Menneville knew what was to be done, and Menneville is dead." This news appeared rather to reassure Gourville than to sadden him.

"To burn them alive?" repeated the messenger, as if he doubted whether that order — the only one that had been given him, moreover — could have been real.

"Yes, certainly, to burn them alive," said the abbé, roughly.

"Granted, Monsieur, granted!" said the man, looking into the eyes and the faces of his two interlocutors, to ascertain what there was profitable or disadvantageous to himself in telling the truth.

"Now proceed," said Gourville.

"The prisoners," continued Danicamp, "were brought to the Grève; and the people, in a fury, insisted upon their being burnt instead of being hanged."

"And the people were right," said the abbé. "Go on!"

"But," resumed the man, "at the moment the archers were broken, at the moment the fire was set to one of the houses of the Place, destined to serve as a funeral-pile for the guilty, the fury, the demon, the giant of whom I told you, and who, we have been informed, was the proprietor of the house in question, aided by a young man

who accompanied him, threw out of the window those who kept up the fire, called to his assistance the musketeers who were in the crowd, leaped himself from the window of the first story into the Place, and plied his sword so desperately that the victory was restored to the archers, the prisoners were retaken, and Menneville killed. When once recaptured, the condemned were executed in three minutes."

Fouquet, in spite of his self-command, could not prevent a deep groan from escaping him.

"And this man, the proprietor of the house, what is his name?" said the abbé.

"I cannot tell you, not having been able to get sight of him; my post had been assigned me in the garden, and I remained at my post; only, the affair was related to me as I repeat it. I was ordered, when once the thing was ended, to come at best speed and announce to you how the affair turned out. According to this order, I set out at full gallop, and here I am."

"Very well, Monsieur, we have nothing else to ask of you," said the abbé, more and more dejected, in proportion as the moment approached for finding himself alone with his brother.

"Have you been paid?" demanded Gourville.

"Partly, Monsieur," replied Danicamp.

"Here are twenty pistoles. Be off, Monsieur, and never forget to defend, as at this time, the true interests of the king."

"Yes, Monsieur," said the man, bowing and pocketing the money. After which he went out.

Scarcely had the door closed behind him when Fouquet, who had remained motionless, advanced with a rapid step, and stood between the abbé and Gourville. Both of them at the same instant opened their mouths to speak to him.

"No excuses," said he, "no recriminations against anybody. If I had not been a false friend, I should not have confided to any one the care of delivering Lyodot and D'Eymeris. I alone am guilty; to me alone are reproaches and remorse due. Leave me, Abbé!"

"And yet, Monsieur, you will not prevent me," replied the latter, "from endeavoring to find out the miserable fellow who has intervened for the advantage of M. Colbert in this so well-arranged affair; for if it is good policy to love our friends dearly, I do not believe that is bad which consists in pursuing our enemies with inveteracy."

"A truce to policy, Abbé! Go, I beg of you, and do not let me hear any more of you till I send for you; what we most need is circumspection and silence. You have a terrible example before you, gentlemen; no retaliation, I forbid it."

"There are no orders," grumbled the abbé, "which will prevent me from avenging a family affront upon the guilty person."

"And I," cried Fouquet, in that imperative tone to which one feels there is nothing to reply, — "if you entertain one thought, one single thought, which is not the absolute expression of my will, I will have you cast into the Bastille two hours after that thought has manifested itself. Regulate your conduct accordingly, Abbé."

The abbé colored and bowed. Fouquet made a sign to Gourville to follow him, and was already directing his steps towards his cabinet, when the usher announced with a loud voice: "M. le Chevalier d'Artagnan."

"Who is he?" said Fouquet, carelessly, to Gourville.

"An ex-lieutenant of his Majesty's Musketeers," replied Gourville, in the same tone. Fouquet did not even take the trouble to reflect, and resumed his walk. "I beg your pardon, Monseigneur!" said Gourville, then, "but I have

remembered; this brave man has left the king's service, and probably comes to receive a quarter of some pension or other."

"Devil take him!" said Fouquet, "why does he choose his time so ill?"

"Permit me, then, Monseigneur, to announce your refusal to him; for he is one of my acquaintance, and is a man whom in our present circumstances it would be better to have as a friend than an enemy."

"Answer him as you please," said Fouquet.

"Eh! good Lord!" said the abbé, still rancorous, like a churchman; "tell him there is no money, particularly for musketeers."

But scarcely had the abbé uttered this imprudent speech, when the partly open door was thrown back, and D'Artagnan appeared.

"M. Fouquet," said he, "I was well aware there was no money for musketeers here. Therefore I did not come to obtain any, but to have it refused. That being done, receive my thanks. I wish you good-day, and will go and seek it at M. Colbert's;" and he went out, after making an easy bow.

"Gourville," said Fouquet, "run after that man and bring him back!" Gourville obeyed, and overtook D'Artagnan on the stairs.

D'Artagnan, hearing steps behind him, turned round and perceived Gourville. "*Mordioux!* my dear Monsieur," said he, "these are sad lessons which you gentlemen of finance teach us! I come to M. Fouquet to receive a sum accorded by his Majesty, and I am received like a mendicant who comes to ask charity, or like a thief who comes to steal a piece of plate."

"But you pronounced the name of M. Colbert, my dear M. d'Artagnan; you said you were going to M. Colbert's?"

"I certainly am going there, were it only to ask satisfaction in regard to the people who try to burn houses, crying, '*Vive* Colbert!'"

Gourville pricked up his ears. "Oh!" said he, "you allude to what has just happened at the Grève?"

"Yes, certainly."

"And in what did that which has taken place concern you?"

"What! do you ask me whether it concerns me, or does not concern me, if M. Colbert pleases to make a funeral-pile of my house?"

"So, your house — was it your house they wanted to burn?"

"*Pardieu!* was it!"

"Is the pot-house of the Image de Notre-Dame yours, then?"

"It has been for a week."

"Well, then, are you the brave captain, are you the valiant blade, who dispersed those who wished to burn the condemned?"

"My dear M. Gourville, put yourself in my place; I am an agent of the public force and a proprietor. As a captain, it is my duty to have the orders of the king accomplished. As a proprietor, it is my interest that my house should not be burned. I have, then, at the same time attended to the laws of interest and duty in replacing Messieurs Lyodot and D'Eymeris in the hands of the archers."

"Then it was you who threw the man out of the window?"

"It was I myself," replied D'Artagnan, modestly.

"And you who killed Menneville?"

"I had that misfortune," said D'Artagnan, bowing like a man who is being congratulated.

"It was you, then, in short, who caused the two condemned persons to be hanged?"

"Instead of being burned; yes, Monsieur, and I glory in it. I snatched the poor devils from horrible tortures. Understand, my dear M. Gourville, that they wanted to burn them alive! It exceeds imagination!"

"Go, my dear M. d'Artagnan, go!" said Gourville, anxious to spare Fouquet the sight of a man who had just caused him such profound grief.

"No," said Fouquet, who had heard all from the door of the antechamber, "not so; on the contrary, M. d'Artagnan, come in."

D'Artagnan wiped from the hilt of his sword a last bloody trace, which had escaped his notice, and returned. He then found himself face to face with these three men, whose countenances wore very different expressions, — with the abbé it was anger, with Gourville stupor, with Fouquet dejection.

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur the Minister," said D'Artagnan, "but my time is short; I have to go to the office of the intendant, to have an explanation with M. Colbert, and to draw my quarter's pension."

"But, Monsieur," said Fouquet, "there is money here." D'Artagnan looked at the superintendent with astonishment. "You have been answered inconsiderately, Monsieur, I know, because I heard it," said the minister; "a man of your merit ought to be known by everybody." D'Artagnan bowed. "Have you an order?" added Fouquet.

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Give it to me, I will pay you myself; come with me."

Fouquet made a sign to Gourville and the abbé, who remained in the room where they were. He led D'Artagnan into his cabinet. As soon as they were there, "How much is due to you, Monsieur?"

"Why, something like five thousand livres, Monseigneur."

"For your arrears of pay?"

"For a quarter's pay."

"A quarter consisting of five thousand livres!" said Fouquet, fixing upon the musketeer a searching look. "Does the king, then, give you twenty thousand livres a year?"

"Yes, Monseigneur, twenty thousand livres a year; do you think it is too much?"

"I?" cried Fouquet; and he smiled bitterly. "If I had any knowledge of mankind; if I were — instead of a frivolous, inconsequent, and vain mind — of a prudent and deliberate mind; if, in a word, I had known, as certain persons have, how to regulate my life, you would not receive twenty thousand livres a year but a hundred thousand, and you would not belong to the king but to me."

D'Artagnan colored slightly. There is in the manner in which a eulogium is given, in the voice of the eulogist, in his affectionate tone, a poison so sweet that the strongest mind is sometimes intoxicated by it. The superintendent ended this speech by opening a drawer and taking from it four *rouleaux*, which he placed before D'Artagnan. The Gascon broke open one. "Gold!" said he.

"It will be less burdensome, Monsieur."

"But then, Monsieur, this makes twenty thousand livres."

"No doubt."

"But only five are due to me."

"I wish to spare you the trouble of coming four times to my office."

"You overwhelm me, Monsieur."

"I do only what I ought to do, Monsieur the Chevalier; and I hope you will not bear me any malice on account of the rude reception my brother gave you. He is of a sour, capricious disposition."

"Monsieur," said D'Artagnan, "believe me nothing would grieve me more than an apology from you."

"Therefore I will make no more, and will content myself with asking of you a favor."

"Oh, Monsieur!"

Fouquet drew from his finger a diamond worth about a thousand pistoles. "Monsieur," said he, "this stone was given me by a friend of my childhood, by a man to whom you have rendered a great service." Fouquet's voice softened perceptibly.

"A service — I?" said the musketeer; "I have rendered a service to one of your friends?"

"You cannot have forgotten it, Monsieur, for it was this very day."

"And that friend's name was — "

"M. d'Eymeris."

"One of the condemned?"

"Yes, one of the victims. Well, M. d'Artagnan, in return for the service you have rendered him, I beg you to accept this diamond. Do so for my sake."

"Monsieur! you — "

"Accept it, I say. To-day is with me a day of mourning; hereafter you will, perhaps, learn why. To-day I have lost a friend; well, I will try to get another."

"But, M. Fouquet — "

"Adieu! M. d'Artagnan, adieu!" cried Fouquet, with much emotion; "or rather, *au revoir!*" and the minister quitted the room, leaving in the hands of the musketeer the ring and the twenty thousand livres.

"Oh!" said D'Artagnan, after a moment's sober reflection. "Do I understand what this means? *Mordioux!* I can understand so far, — he is a gallant man! I will go and explain matters with M. Colbert;" and he went out.

CHAPTER XVI.

OF THE NOTABLE DIFFERENCE D'ARTAGNAN FINDS BETWEEN MONSIEUR THE INTENDANT AND MONSIEUR THE SUPERINTENDENT.

M. Colbert resided in the Rue Neuve des Petits-Champs, in a house which had belonged to Beautru. D'Artagnan's legs cleared the distance in a short quarter of an hour. When he arrived at the residence of the new favorite, the court was full of archers and policemen, who had come to congratulate him or to excuse themselves, according to whether he should choose to praise or blame. The sentiment of flattery is instinctive among people of abject condition; they have the sense of it, as the wild animal has that of hearing and smell. These people, or their leader, had understood that they could give pleasure to M. Colbert in rendering him an account of the way in which his name had been pronounced during the affray.

D'Artagnan made his appearance just as the chief of the watch was giving his report. D'Artagnan stood close to the door, behind the archers. That officer took Colbert aside, in spite of his resistance and the contraction of his heavy eyebrows. "In case," said he, "you had really desired, Monsieur, that the people should do justice to the two traitors, it would have been wise to warn us of it; for indeed, Monsieur, in spite of our regret at displeasing you or thwarting your views, we had our orders to execute."

"Triple fool!" replied Colbert, furiously shaking his hair, thick and black as a mane; "what are you telling

me here? What! that I could have had an idea of a riot! Are you mad or drunk?"

"But, Monsieur, they cried, '*Vive* Colbert!'" replied the trembling chief of watch.

"A handful of conspirators —"

"No, no; a mass of people."

"Ah, indeed!" said Colbert, expanding. "A mass of people cried, '*Vive* Colbert!' Are you certain of what you say, Monsieur?"

"We had nothing to do but to open our ears, or rather to close them, so terrible were the cries."

"And this was from the people, the real people?"

"Certainly, Monsieur; only, these real people beat us."

"Oh, very well!" continued Colbert, thoughtfully. "Then you suppose it was the people who wished to burn the condemned?"

"Oh, yes, Monsieur!"

"That is quite another thing. You strongly resisted, then?"

"We had three men killed, Monsieur."

"But you killed nobody yourselves?"

"Monsieur, a few of the rioters were left upon the square, and one among them was not a common man."

"Who was he?"

"A certain Menneville, upon whom the police have a long time had an eye."

"Menneville!" exclaimed Colbert, "what! he who killed, in the Rue de la Hochette, a worthy man who wanted a fat fowl?"

"Yes, Monsieur; the same."

"And did this Menneville also cry, '*Vive* Colbert!'"

"Louder than all the rest; like a madman."

The brow of Colbert became cloudy and wrinkled. A

kind of ambitious glory which had lighted his face was extinguished, like the light of those glow-worms which we crush beneath the grass. "Why, then, do you say," resumed the deceived intendant, "that the initiative came from the people? Menneville was my enemy; I would have had him hanged, and he knew it well. Menneville belonged to the Abbé Fouquet, — the whole affair originated with Fouquet; does not everybody know that the condemned were his friends from childhood?"

"That is true," thought D'Artagnan, "and now are all my doubts cleared up. I repeat it: M. Fouquet may be what they please, but he is a gallant man."

"And," pursued Colbert, "are you quite sure Menneville is dead?"

D'Artagnan thought the time had come for him to make his appearance. "Perfectly, Monsieur," replied he, advancing suddenly.

"Oh! is that you, Monsieur?" said Colbert.

"In person," replied the musketeer, with his deliberate tone; "it appears that you had in Menneville a pretty little enemy."

"It was not I, Monsieur, who had an enemy," replied Colbert; "it was the king."

"Double brute!" thought D'Artagnan, "to think to play the great man and the hypocrite with me. Well," continued he to Colbert, "I am very happy to have rendered so good a service to the king; will you take upon yourself to tell his Majesty, Monsieur the Intendant?"

"What commission do you give me, and what do you charge me to tell his Majesty, Monsieur? Be precise, if you please," said Colbert, in a sharp voice, tuned beforehand to hostility.

"I give you no commission," replied D'Artagnan, with that calmness which never abandons the banterer. "I

thought it would be easy for you to announce to his Majesty that it was I who, being there by chance, did justice to Menneville, and restored things to order."

Colbert opened his eyes, and interrogated the chief of the watch with a look. "Ah, it is very true," said the latter, "that this gentleman saved us."

"Why did you not tell me, Monsieur, that you had come to inform me of this?" said Colbert, with envy; "everything is explained, and better for you than for any other."

"You are in error, Monsieur the Intendant; I did not at all come for the purpose of informing you of this."

"It is an exploit, nevertheless."

"Oh!" said the musketeer, carelessly, "constant habit blunts the mind."

"To what do I owe the honor of your visit, then?"

"Simply to this: the king ordered me to come to you."

"Ah!" said Colbert, recovering his self-possession, because he saw D'Artagnan draw a paper from his pocket; "it is to demand some money of me?"

"Precisely, Monsieur."

"Have the goodness to wait, if you please, Monsieur, till I have despatched the report of the watch."

D'Artagnan turned round upon his heel insolently enough, and finding himself face to face with Colbert after this first turn, bowed to him as a harlequin would have done; then, after a second evolution, he directed his steps towards the door in quick time. Colbert was struck with this pointed rudeness, to which he was not accustomed. In general, men of the sword, when they came to his office, were in such want of money that though their feet had taken root in the marble, they would not have lost their patience. Was D'Artagnan

going straight to the king? Would he go and complain of his bad reception, or recount his exploit? This was a grave matter of consideration. At all events, the moment was badly chosen to send D'Artagnan away, whether he came from the king or on his own account. The musketeer had rendered too great a service, and that too recently, for it to be already forgotten. Therefore Colbert thought it would be better to shake off his arrogance and call D'Artagnan back. "Ho, M. d'Artagnan!" cried Colbert; "what! are you leaving me thus?"

D'Artagnan turned round. "Why not?" said he, quietly; "we have no more to say to each other, have we?"

"You have at least money to get, as you have an order."

"Who? I? Oh, not at all, my dear M. Colbert!"

"But, Monsieur, you have an order! And in the same manner as you give a sword-thrust for the king when you are required, I, on my part, pay when an order is presented to me. Present yours."

"It is useless, my dear M. Colbert," said D'Artagnan, who inwardly enjoyed the confusion introduced into the ideas of Colbert; "this order is paid."

"Paid! by whom?"

"Why, by Monsieur the Superintendent."

Colbert turned pale. "Explain yourself, then," said he, in a stifled voice; "if you are paid, why do you show me that paper?"

"In consequence of the charge of which you spoke to me so ingeniously just now, dear M. Colbert; the king told me to draw a quarter of the pension he is pleased to make me."

"Of me?" said Colbert.

"Not exactly. The king said to me: 'Go to M. Fou-

quet; the superintendent will, perhaps, have no money, then you will go and draw it of M. Colbert.'"

The countenance of M. Colbert brightened for a moment; but it was with his unfortunate physiognomy as with a stormy sky, sometimes radiant, sometimes dark as night, according as the lightning gleams or the cloud passes. "And was there any money in the superintendent's coffers?" asked he.

"Why, yes, he could not be badly off for money," replied D'Artagnan, "since M. Fouquet, instead of paying me a quarter, five thousand livres — "

"A quarter, five thousand livres!" exclaimed Colbert, struck, as Fouquet had been, with the largeness of the sum destined to pay for the service of a soldier; "why, that would be a pension of twenty thousand livres!"

"Exactly, M. Colbert. *Peste!* you reckon like old Pythagoras; yes, twenty thousand livres."

"Ten times the salary of an intendant of the finances! I beg to offer you my compliments," said Colbert, with a venomous smile.

"Oh!" said D'Artagnan, "the king apologized for giving me so little; but he promised to make it more hereafter, when he should be rich; but I must go, having much to do — "

"So, then, notwithstanding the expectation of the king, the superintendent paid you, did he?"

"In the same manner as, in opposition to the king's expectation, you refused to pay me."

"I did not refuse, Monsieur; I only begged you to wait. And you say that M. Fouquet paid you your five thousand livres?"

"Yes, as you might have done; but he did still better than that, M. Colbert."

"And what did he do?"

"He politely counted me down the whole of the sum, saying that, for the king, his coffers were always full."

"The whole of the sum! M. Fouquet has counted you out twenty thousand livres instead of five thousand?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"And what for?"

"In order to spare me three visits to the money-chest of the superintendent; so that I have the twenty thousand livres in my pocket in good new coin. You see, then, that I am able to go away without standing in need of you, having come here only for form's sake;" and D'Artagnan slapped his hand upon his pocket, with a laugh which disclosed to Colbert thirty-two magnificent teeth, as white as those of a man twenty-five years old, and which seemed to say in their language, "Serve up to us thirty-two little Colberts, and we will grind them willingly."

The serpent is as brave as the lion, the hawk as courageous as the eagle; that cannot be disputed. It can only be said of animals that are decidedly cowardly, and are so called, that they will be brave when they have to defend themselves. Colbert was not frightened at the thirty-two teeth of D'Artagnan; he recovered himself, and suddenly. "Monsieur," said he, "Monsieur the Superintendent has done what he had no right to do."

"What do you mean by that?" replied D'Artagnan.

"I mean that your order — will you let me see your order, if you please?"

"Very willingly; here it is."

Colbert seized the paper with an eagerness which the musketeer did not remark without uneasiness, and particularly without a certain degree of regret at having trusted him with it. "Well, Monsieur, the royal order says this: 'At sight, I command that there be paid to M.

d'Artagnan the sum of five thousand livres, forming a quarter of the pension I have made him.'"

"So, in fact, it is written," said D'Artagnan, affecting calmness.

"Very well; the king owed you only five thousand livres. Why has more been given to you?"

"Because there was more, and M. Fouquet was willing to give me more. That does not concern anybody."

"It is natural," said Colbert, with supercilious ease, "that you should be ignorant of the usages of finance; but, Monsieur, when you have a thousand livres to pay, what do you do?"

"I never have a thousand livres to pay," replied D'Artagnan.

"Once more," said Colbert, irritated, "if you had any payment to make, would you not pay what you ought?"

"That only proves one thing," said D'Artagnan; "and that is, that you have your particular customs in finance, while M. Fouquet has his own."

"Mine, Monsieur, are the correct ones."

"I do not say they are not."

"And you have received what was not due to you."

The eye of D'Artagnan flashed. "What is not due to me yet, you meant to say, M. Colbert; for if I had received what was not due to me at all, I should have committed a theft."

Colbert made no reply to this subtlety. "You then owe fifteen thousand livres to the public treasury," said he, carried away by his jealous ardor.

"Then you must give me credit for them," replied D'Artagnan, with his imperceptible irony.

"Not at all, Monsieur."

"Well, what will you do, then? You will not take my *rouleaux* from me, will you?"

"You must return them to my coffers."

"I? Oh, Monsieur Colbert, don't reckon upon that!

"The king wants his money, Monsieur."

"And I, Monsieur, — I want the king's money."

"That may be; but you must return this."

"By no means. I have always understood that in matters of finance, as you call it, a good cashier never gives back, nor takes back."

"Then, Monsieur, we shall see what the king will say about it. I will show him this order, which proves that M. Fouquet not only pays what he does not owe, but that he does not even take care of the receipts for what he has paid."

"Ah! now I understand why you have taken that paper, M. Colbert!"

Colbert did not perceive all that there was of a threatening character in his name pronounced in a certain manner. "You will see hereafter what use I shall make of it," replied he, holding up the order in his fingers.

"Oh!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, snatching the paper from him by a rapid movement, "I understand it perfectly well, M. Colbert; I have no occasion to wait for that;" and he crumpled up in his pocket the paper he had so cleverly seized.

"Monsieur! Monsieur!" cried Colbert, "that is violence!"

"Nonsense! you must not be particular about the manners of a soldier!" replied the musketeer. "Receive my compliments, my dear M. Colbert!" and he went out, laughing in the face of the future minister.

"That man, now," muttered he, "was about to adore me; it is a great pity I was obliged to part company with him."

CHAPTER XVII.

PHILOSOPHY OF THE HEART AND MIND.

For a man who had seen so many much more dangerous positions, that of D'Artagnan with respect to M. Colbert was only comic. D'Artagnan, therefore, did not deny himself the satisfaction of laughing at the expense of Monsieur the Intendant, from the Rue Neuve des Petits-Champs to the Rue des Lombards. It was a great while since D'Artagnan had laughed so long. He was still laughing when Planchet appeared, laughing likewise, at the door of his house; for Planchet, since the return of his patron, since the entrance of the English guineas, passed the greater part of his life in doing what D'Artagnan had done only from the Rue Neuve des Petits-Champs to the Rue des Lombards.

"You have come, then, my dear master?" said Planchet.

"No, my friend," replied the musketeer; "I am going and that quickly. I will sup with you, go to bed, sleep five hours, and at break of day leap into my saddle. Has my horse had an extra feed?"

"Eh! my dear master," replied Planchet, "you know very well that your horse is the jewel of the family; that my lads are caressing it all day, and cramming it with sugar, nuts, and biscuits. You ask me if he has had an extra feed of oats; you should ask if he has not had enough to burst him ten times over."

"Very well, Planchet; that is all right. Now, then, I pass to what concerns me, — my supper?"

"Ready. A smoking roast, white wine, crawfish, and fresh-gathered cherries. That is something new, my master."

"You are a capital fellow, Planchet; come on, then, let us sup, and I will go to bed."

During supper D'Artagnan observed that Planchet kept rubbing his forehead, as if to facilitate the issue of some idea closely pent within his brain. He looked with an air of kindness at this worthy companion of his former trials, and clinking glass against glass, "Come, Friend Planchet," said he, "let us see what it is that gives you so much trouble to announce to me. *Mordioux!* speak freely, and you will speak quickly."

"Well, this is it," answered Planchet; "you appear to me to be going on some expedition or other."

"I don't say that I am not."

"Then you have some new idea?"

"That is possible, too, Planchet."

"Then there will be a fresh capital to be ventured. I will lay down fifty thousand livres upon the idea you are about to carry out;" and so saying, Planchet rubbed his hands one against the other with a rapidity evincing great delight.

"Planchet," said D'Artagnan, "there is but one misfortune in it."

"And what is that?"

"That the idea is not mine. I can risk nothing upon it." These words drew a deep sigh from the heart of Planchet. Avarice is an ardent counsellor: she carries away her man, as Satan did Jesus, to the mountain; and when once she has shown to an unfortunate man all the kingdoms of the earth, she may take her ease, knowing full well that she has left her companion Envy to gnaw his heart. Planchet had tasted of riches

easily acquired, and was never afterwards likely to limit his desires; but as he had a good heart in spite of his covetousness, as he adored D'Artagnan, he could not refrain from paying him a thousand compliments, each more affectionate than the others. He would not have been sorry, nevertheless, to have caught a little hint of the secret his master concealed so well; but tricks, turns, counsels, and traps were all useless, — D'Artagnan let nothing confidential escape him.

The evening passed thus. After supper the portmanteau occupied D'Artagnan's attention; he took a turn to the stable, patted his horse, and examined his shoes and legs; then, having counted over his money, he went to bed, sleeping as if only twenty years old, because he had neither anxiety nor remorse; he closed his eyes five minutes after having blown out his light. Yet there were many things to keep him awake. Thought surged in his brain, conjectures abounded, and D'Artagnan was a great drawer of horoscopes; but with that imperturbable phlegm which does more than genius for the fortune and happiness of men of action, he put off reflection till the next day, for fear, he said, that he might not be fresh when he wanted to be so.

The day came. The Rue des Lombards had its share of the caresses of Aurora with the rosy fingers, and D'Artagnan arose with Aurora. He did not awaken anybody; he placed his portmanteau under his arm, descended the stairs without making one of them creak, and without disturbing one of the sleepers whose sonorous breathing might be heard in every story from garret to cellar; then, having saddled his horse and shut the stable and house doors, he set off, at a foot-pace, on his expedition to Bretagne. He had done quite right in not thinking over, the evening before, all the political and

diplomatic affairs which solicited his attention; for in the morning, in the freshness of the mild twilight, his ideas developed themselves with clearness and fluency. In the first place, as he passed the house of Fouquet, he threw into a large gaping box at the superintendent's door the fortunate order which, the evening before, he had had so much trouble to extract from the hooked fingers of the intendant. Placed in an envelope, and addressed to Fouquet, its nature had not even been divined by Planchet, who in divination was equal to Calchas or the Pythian Apollo. D'Artagnan thus sent back the receipt to Fouquet, without compromising himself, and without having thenceforward any reproaches to make himself. When he had effected this proper restitution, "Now," said he to himself, "let us inhale freely the morning air; let us invite freedom from care, and abundant health; let us allow the horse Zephyr, whose flanks swell as if he had to snuff in a hemisphere, to breathe; and let us be very ingenious in our little calculations. It is time," pursued D'Artagnan, "to form a plan of the campaign; and, according to the method of M. de Turenne, who has a very large head full of all sorts of good counsel, before the plan of the campaign it is advisable to draw a portrait of the generals to whom we are to be opposed. In the first place, M. Fouquet presents himself. What is M. Fouquet? M. Fouquet," replied D'Artagnan to himself, "is a handsome man, very much beloved by the women; a generous man, very much beloved by the poets; a man of wit, much execrated by pretenders. I am neither woman, poet, nor pretender; I neither love nor hate Monsieur the Superintendent. I find myself, therefore, in the same position in which M. de Turenne found himself when he had to win the Battle of the Dunes. He did not hate the Spaniards, but he

beat them soundly. No, there is a better example; I am in the same position in which M. de Turenne found himself when opposed to the Prince de Condé at Jargeau, Gien, and the Faubourg St. Antoine. He did not execrate Monsieur the Prince, it is true, but he obeyed the king. Monsieur the Prince is an agreeable man, but the king is king. Turenne heaved a deep sigh, called Condé 'My cousin,' and swept away his army. Now, what does the king wish? That does not concern me. Now, what does M. Colbert wish? Oh, that 's another thing. M. Colbert wishes all that M. Fouquet does not wish. Then what does M. Fouquet wish? Oh, that is serious! M. Fouquet wishes precisely all that the king wishes."

This monologue ended, D'Artagnan began to laugh, while making his whip whistle in the air. He was already on the high-road, frightening the birds in the hedges, listening to the louis dancing in his leather pocket at every step; and, let us confess it, every time that D'Artagnan found himself in such circumstances, tenderness was not his dominant vice. "Come," said he, "the expedition is not a very dangerous one; and it will fall out with my voyage as with that play M. Monk took me to see in London, which was called, I think, 'Much Ado about Nothing.'"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE JOURNEY.

It was perhaps the fiftieth time since the day on which we opened this history, that this man, with a heart of bronze and muscles of steel, had left house and friends — everything, in short — to go in search of fortune and death. The one — that is to say, Death — had constantly retreated before him, as if afraid of him; the other — that is to say, Fortune — only for a month past had really made an alliance with him. Although he was not a great philosopher, after the fashion of either Epicurus or Socrates, his was a powerful mind, having knowledge of life and endowed with thought. No one is as brave, as adventurous, or as skilful as D'Artagnan, without being at the same time inclined to be a *dreamer*. He had picked up here and there some scraps of M. de la Rochefoucauld, worthy of being translated into Latin by the gentlemen of Port Royal; and he had made a collection, while passing the time in the society of Athos and Aramis, of many morsels of Seneca and Cicero, translated by them and applied to the uses of common life. That contempt of riches which our Gascon had observed as an article of faith during the first thirty-five years of his life had for a long time been considered by him as the first article of the code of bravery. "Article first," said he: "A man is brave because he has nothing; a man has nothing because he despises riches." Therefore, with these principles, which, as we have said, had regulated

the first thirty-five years of his life, D'Artagnan was no sooner possessed of riches than he felt it necessary to ask himself if in spite of his riches he were still brave. To this, for any other than D'Artagnan, the episode of the Place de Grève might have served as an answer. Many consciences would have been satisfied with it, but D'Artagnan was brave enough to ask himself sincerely and conscientiously if he were brave. Therefore to this, "But it appears to me that I drew promptly enough and cut and thrust prettily enough on the Place de Grève to be satisfied of my bravery," D'Artagnan had himself replied : —

"Gently, Captain ; that is not an answer. I was brave that day, because they were burning my house ; and there are a hundred, and even a thousand, odds against one, that if those gentlemen of the riots had not formed that unlucky idea, their plan of attack would have succeeded, or at least it would not have been I who opposed myself to it. Now, what will be brought against me? I have no house to be burned in Bretagne ; I have no treasure there that can be taken from me. No ; but I have my skin, — that precious skin of M. d'Artagnan, which to him is worth more than all the houses and all the treasures of the world ; that skin to which I cling above everything, because it is, everything considered, the binding of a body which encloses a heart very warm and very well satisfied to beat and consequently to live. Then, I do desire to live ; and in reality I live much better, more completely, since I have become rich. Who the devil ever said that money spoiled life? Upon my soul, it is no such thing ; on the contrary, it seems as if I absorbed a double quantity of air and sunlight. *Mordioux !* what will it be, then, if I double that fortune, and if instead of the switch I now hold in my hand I should ever

carry the bâton of a marshal? Then, I really don't know if there will be, from that moment, enough of air and sunlight for me. In fact, this is not a dream; who the devil would oppose it, if the king made me a duke and a marshal, as his father, King Louis XIII., made a duke and constable of Albert de Luynes? Am I not as brave as that imbecile De Vitry, and much more intelligent than he? Ah! that 's exactly what will prevent my advancement; I have too much wit. Luckily, if there is any justice in this world, Fortune owes me many compensations. She owes me, certainly, a recompense for all I did for Anne of Austria, and an indemnification for all she has not done for me. Then at the present I am very well with a king, and with a king who has the appearance of determining to reign. May God keep him in that illustrious road! For if he is resolved to reign, he will want me; and if he wants me, he will give me what he has promised me, — warmth and light; so that I march, comparatively, to-day, as I marched formerly, — from nothing to everything. Only, the nothing of to-day is the all of former days; there has only this little change taken place in my life. And now let us see! let us take into consideration the heart, as I just now was speaking of it. But, in truth, I only spoke of it from memory;" and the Gascon applied his hand to his breast, as if he were actually seeking the place where his heart was.

"Ah, wretch!" murmured he, smiling with bitterness. "Ah, poor worm! You hoped for an instant that you had not a heart, and now you find you have one, — bad courtier as you are, — and even one of the most seditious. You have a heart which speaks to you in favor of M. Fouquet. And what is M. Fouquet when the king is in question? A conspirator, a real conspirator, who did not even give himself the trouble to conceal his being a

conspirator; therefore, what a weapon would you not have against him, if his good grace and his intelligence had not made a scabbard for that weapon! An armed revolt! — for, in fact, M. Fouquet has been guilty of an armed revolt. Thus, while the king vaguely suspects M. Fouquet of rebellion, I know it, — I could prove that M. Fouquet had caused the shedding of the blood of his Majesty's subjects. Now, then, let us see! Knowing all that, and holding my tongue, what further would this pitiful heart wish in return for a kind action of M. Fouquet's, for an advance of fifteen thousand livres, for a diamond worth a thousand pistoles, for a smile in which there was as much bitterness as kindness? — I save his life.

"Now, I hope," continued the musketeer, "that this imbecile of a heart is going to preserve silence, and so be fairly quits with M. Fouquet. Now, then, the king becomes my sun; and as my heart is quits with M. Fouquet, let him beware who places himself between me and my sun! Forward, for his Majesty Louis XIV.! forward!"

These reflections were the only impediments which could retard the progress of D'Artagnan. These reflections once finished, he increased the speed of his horse. But, however perfect his horse Zephyr might be, he could not go on forever. The day after his departure from Paris, he left him at Chartres, with an old friend he had met in a hotel-keeper of that city. From that moment the musketeer travelled on post-horses. Thanks to this mode of locomotion, he traversed the space which separates Chartres from Châteaubriand. In the last of these two cities, far enough from the coast to prevent any one guessing that D'Artagnan wished to reach the sea, — far enough from Paris to prevent all suspicion of his

coming as a messenger from his Majesty, Louis XIV., whom D'Artagnan had called his sun, without suspecting that he who was only at present a rather poor star in the heaven of royalty, would one day make that star his emblem, — the messenger of Louis XIV., we say, gave up post-horses and purchased a nag of the meanest appearance, one of those animals which an officer of cavalry would never think of choosing for fear of being disgraced. Excepting the color, this new acquisition recalled to the mind of D'Artagnan the famous orange-colored horse with which, or rather upon which, he had made his first entrance into active life. Truth to say, from the moment he mounted this new steed, it was no longer D'Artagnan who was travelling, — it was a good man clothed in an iron-gray close coat and maroon trunk-hose, preserving the mean between a priest and a layman ; that which brought him nearest to the churchman was that D'Artagnan had placed on his head a skull-cap of threadbare velvet, and over it a large black hat. In place of a sword, a stick, hung by a cord to his wrist ; but to which he promised himself to join as an unexpected auxiliary, upon occasion, a good dagger, ten inches long, concealed under his cloak. The nag purchased at Châteaubriand completed the metamorphosis ; it was called, or rather D'Artagnan called it, Furet (ferret).

"If I have changed Zephyr into Furet," said D'Artagnan, "I must make some diminutive or other of my own name. So, instead of D'Artagnan, I will be Agnan, for short ; that is a concession which I naturally owe to my gray coat, my round hat, and my rusty cap."

M. Agnan, then, travelled without too great a shaking up upon Furet, who ambled like a true butter-woman's pad, and who with his amble made cheerfully twelve leagues a day, upon four spindle-shanks whose strength

and sureness the practised eye of D'Artagnan had appreciated beneath the thick mass of hair which covered them. Jogging along, the traveller took notes, studied the stern and cold landscape through which he was travelling, ever seeking the most plausible pretext to go to Belle-Isle-en-Mer, and to see everything without arousing suspicion. In this manner he was enabled to convince himself of the importance the event assumed in proportion as he drew near to it. In this remote country, in this ancient duchy of Bretagne, — which was not France at that period, and is not even to-day, — the people knew nothing of the King of France. They not only did not know him, but they were unwilling to know him. One fact — a single one — floated visibly for them upon the current of politics. Their ancient dukes no longer governed them; but there was a void, — nothing more. In the place of the sovereign duke, the seigneurs of parishes reigned without control; and, above these seigneurs, God, who has never been forgotten in Bretagne. Among these suzerains of castles and parishes, the most powerful, the most rich, and above all the most popular, was M. Fouquet, seigneur of Belle-Isle. Even in the country, even within sight of that mysterious isle, legends and traditions consecrated its wonders. Every one did not penetrate into it; the isle, of an extent of six leagues in length and six in breadth, was a seigniorial property which the people had for a long time respected, protected as it was by the name of Retz, so much dreaded in the country. Shortly after the raising of this seigniory to a marquisate by Charles IX., Belle-Isle passed to M. Fouquet. The celebrity of the isle did not date from yesterday; its name, or rather its qualification, is traced back to the remotest antiquity; the ancients called it Kalonèse, from two Greek words, signifying "beautiful

isle." Thus, at a distance of eighteen hundred years, it had borne, in another language, the same name it still bears. There was, then, something in itself in this property of M. Fouquet's, besides its position six leagues off the coast of France, — a position which makes it a sovereign in its maritime solitude, like a majestic ship which should disdain roads, and proudly cast its anchor in mid-ocean.

D'Artagnan learned all this without appearing the least in the world astonished. He also learned that the best way to get intelligence was to go to La Roche-Bernard, a tolerably important city at the mouth of the Vilaine. Perhaps there he could embark ; if not, crossing the salt marshes, he would repair to Guérande or to Le Croisic, to wait for an opportunity to cross over to Belle-Isle. He had discovered, besides, since his departure from Châteaubriand, that nothing would be impossible for Furet under M. Agnan's urging, and nothing to M. Agnan upon Furet's example. He prepared, then, to sup off a teal and an oil-cake, in a hotel of La Roche-Bernard, and ordered to be brought from the cellar, to wash down these two Breton dishes, some cider, which, the moment it touched his lips, he perceived to be more Breton still.

CHAPTER XIX.

HOW D'ARTAGNAN BECAME ACQUAINTED WITH A POET WHO HAD TURNED PRINTER FOR THE SAKE OF PRINTING HIS OWN VERSES.

Before taking his place at table, D'Artagnan acquired, as was his custom, all the information he could; but it is an axiom of curiosity, that every man who wishes to question well and fruitfully ought in the first place to lay himself open to questions. D'Artagnan sought, then, with his usual skill, a useful questioner in the hostelry of La Roche-Bernard. At the moment there were in the house, in the first story, two travellers occupied also in preparations for supper, or with their supper itself. D'Artagnan had seen their nags in the stable, and their baggage in the hall. One travelled with a lackey, as an important personage; two Perche mares — sleek, sound beasts — were their means of locomotion. The other — rather a little fellow, a traveller of meagre appearance, wearing a dusty surtout, dirty linen, boots more worn by the pavement than the stirrup — had come from Nantes with a cart drawn by a horse so like Furet in color, that D'Artagnan might have gone a hundred miles without finding a better match. This cart contained divers large packets wrapped up in pieces of old stuff.

"That traveller there," said D'Artagnan to himself, "is the man for my money. He will do; he suits me. I ought to do for and suit him; M. Agnan, with the gray doublet and the rusty cap, is not unworthy of supping with the gentleman of the old boots and the old horse."

This being said, D'Artagnan called the host, and desired him to send his teal, oil-cake, and cider up to the room of the gentleman of modest exterior. He himself climbed, a plate in his hand, the wooden staircase which led to the chamber, and began to knock at the door.

"Come in!" said the unknown. D'Artagnan entered, with a simper on his lips, his plate under his arm, his hat in one hand, his candle in the other.

"Excuse me, Monsieur," said he; "I am, as you are, a traveller. I know no one in the hotel, and I have the bad habit of losing my spirits when I eat alone; so that my repast appears a bad one to me, and does not nourish me. Your face, which I saw just now, when you came down to have some oysters opened, — your face pleased me much. Besides, I have observed that you have a horse just like mine, and that the host, no doubt on account of that resemblance, has placed them side by side in the stable, where they appear to agree amazingly well. I therefore, Monsieur, cannot see why the masters should be separated when the horses are together. In consequence, I am come to request the pleasure of being admitted to your table. My name is Agnan at your service, Monsieur, the unworthy steward of a rich seigneur, who wishes to purchase some salt-mines in this country, and sends me to examine his future acquisitions. In truth, Monsieur, I should be well pleased if my countenance were as agreeable to you as yours is to me; for, upon my honor, I like you exceedingly."

The stranger, whom D'Artagnan saw for the first time, — for before he had only caught a glimpse of him, — the stranger had black and brilliant eyes, a yellow complexion, a brow a little wrinkled by the weight of fifty years, simplicity in his features collectively, but a little cunning in the glance of his eye.

"One would say," thought D'Artagnan, "that this merry fellow has never exercised more than the upper part of his head, his eyes, and his brain. He must be a man of science; his mouth, nose, and chin signify absolutely nothing."

"Monsieur," replied the latter, with whose mind and person we have been making so free, "you do me much honor. Not that I am ever low-spirited, for I have," added he, smiling, "company which amuses me always; but, never mind that, I am very happy to receive you." But while saying this, the man with the worn boots cast an uneasy look at his table, from which the oysters had disappeared, and upon which there was nothing left but a morsel of salt bacon.

"Monsieur," D'Artagnan hastened to say, "the host is bringing me up a fine piece of roasted poultry and a superb oil-cake." D'Artagnan had read in the look of his companion, however rapid it had been, the fear of an attack by a parasite; he guessed rightly. At this overture the features of the man of modest exterior relaxed; and as if he had watched the moment for his entrance, the host straightway appeared, bearing the dishes mentioned. The oil-cake and the teal were added to the morsel of broiled bacon; D'Artagnan and his guest bowed to each other, sat down face to face, and, like two brothers, shared the bacon and the other dishes.

"Monsieur," said D'Artagnan, "you must confess that partnership is a wonderful thing."

"How so?" replied the stranger, with his mouth full.

"Well, I will tell you," replied D'Artagnan.

The stranger gave a short truce to the movement of his jaws, in order to hear the better.

"In the first place," continued D'Artagnan, "instead of one candle, which each of us had, we have two."

"That is true!" said the stranger, struck with the extreme justness of the observation.

"Then I see that you eat my oil-cake by preference, while I, by preference, eat your bacon."

"That is true, again."

"And then, besides the pleasure of being better lighted and eating things according to our taste, I add the pleasure of your company."

"Truly, Monsieur, you are very jovial," said the unknown, cheerfully.

"Yes, Monsieur, jovial, as all people are who carry nothing in their heads. Oh! I can see it is quite another sort of thing with you," continued D'Artagnan; "I can read in your eyes all sorts of genius."

"Oh, Monsieur!"

"Come, confess one thing."

"What is that?"

"That you are a learned man."

"Faith, Monsieur."

"Hey?"

"Almost."

"Come, then!"

"I am an author."

"There!" cried D'Artagnan, clapping his hands in delight; "I knew I could not be deceived! It is a miracle!"

"Monsieur —"

"What! shall I have the honor of passing the evening in the society of an author, — of a celebrated author, perhaps?"

"Oh!" said the unknown, blushing, "'celebrated,' Monsieur, 'celebrated' is not the word."

"Modest!" cried D'Artagnan, enraptured, "he is modest!" Then, turning towards the stranger, with an

air of blunt good nature, — "But tell me at least the names of your works, Monsieur; for you will please to observe you have not told me your own, and I have been forced to divine your genius."

"My name is Jupenet, Monsieur," said the author.

"A fine name! a fine name! upon my word; and I do not know why — pardon me the blunder, if it be one — but surely I have heard that name somewhere."

"I have made verses," said the poet, modestly.

"Ah! that is it, then; I have heard them read."

"A tragedy."

"I must have seen it played."

The poet blushed again, and said: "I do not think that can be the case, for my verses have not been printed."

"Well, then, it must have been the tragedy which acquainted me with your name."

"You are again mistaken, for the comedians of the Hôtel de Bourgogne would have nothing to do with it," said the poet, with the smile of which certain kinds of pride alone know the secret. D'Artagnan bit his lips. "Thus, then, you see, Monsieur," continued the poet, "you are in error on my account, and that, not being at all known to you, you have never heard me spoken of."

"And that confounds me. That name, Jupenet, appears to me, nevertheless, a fine name, and quite as worthy of being known as those of Corneille or Rotrou or Garnier. I hope, Monsieur, you will have the goodness to repeat to me a part of your tragedy presently, by way of dessert, for instance. That will be sugared toast, — *mordioux!* Ah! pardon me, Monsieur, that was a little oath which escaped me, because it is a habit with my lord and master. I sometimes allow myself to usurp that little oath, as it seems in good taste. I take this liberty only

in his absence, please to observe ; for you may understand that in his presence — But, in truth, Monsieur, this cider is abominable, do you not think so? And besides, the pot is of such an irregular shape it will not stand on the table."

"Suppose we wedge it?"

"To be sure ; but with what?"

"With this knife."

"And the teal, — with what shall we cut that up? Do you not mean to touch the teal?"

"Certainly."

"Well then — "

"Wait."

The poet rummaged in his pocket, and drew out a small piece of metal, oblong, quadrangular, about a line in thickness and an inch and a half in length. But scarcely had this little piece of metal seen the light, when the poet appeared to think he had committed an imprudence, and made a motion to put it back again in his pocket. D'Artagnan perceived this, — for he was a man whom nothing escaped. He stretched forth his hand towards the piece of metal: "Humph! that which you hold in your hand is pretty; may I look at it?"

"Certainly," said the poet, who appeared to have yielded too soon to a first impulse, — "certainly, you may look at it. But it will be in vain for you to look at it," added he, with a satisfied air; "if I were not to tell you the use of that, you would never guess it."

D'Artagnan had interpreted as a confession the hesitation of the poet, and his eagerness to conceal the piece of metal which a first impulse had induced him to take out of his pocket. His attention, therefore, once awakened on this point, he indued himself with a vigilance which gave him a superiority upon all occasions. Besides, what-

ever M. Jupenet might say about it, by the simple inspection of the object, he had known perfectly what it was. It was a character used in printing.

"Can you guess, now, what this is?" continued the poet.

"No," said D'Artagnan; "no, faith!"

"Well, Monsieur," said M. Jupenet, "this little piece of metal is a printing letter."

"Bah!"

"A capital letter."

"Stop! stop! stop!" said D'Artagnan, opening his eyes very innocently.

"Yes, Monsieur, a capital J; the first letter of my name."

"And this is a letter, is it?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Well, I will confess one thing to you."

"And what is that?"

"No, I will not; I was going to say something very stupid."

"Oh, no!" said Master Jupenet, with a patronizing air.

"Well, then, I cannot comprehend, if that is a letter, how you can make a word."

"A word?"

"Yes, a printed word."

"Oh, that 's very easy."

"Let me see."

"Does it interest you?"

"Enormously."

"Well, I will explain the thing to you. Attend!"

"I am attending."

"Here it is."

"Good!"

"Look attentively."

"I am looking." D'Artagnan, in fact, appeared absorbed in his contemplation. Jupenet drew from his pocket seven or eight other pieces of metal, but smaller than the first.

"Ah! ah!" said D'Artagnan.

"What?"

"You have, then, a whole printing-office in your pocket. *Peste!* that is curious indeed."

"Is it not?"

"Good God! what a number of things we learn by travelling!"

"To your health!" said Jupenet, quite enchanted.

"To yours, *mordioux!* to yours. But — an instant — not in this cider. It is an abominable drink, unworthy of a man who quenches his thirst at the Hippocrene fountain; is it not thus you call your fountain, you poets?"

"Yes, Monsieur, our fountain is indeed so called. That comes from two Greek words, — *hippos*, which means a horse, and —"

"Monsieur," interrupted D'Artagnan, "you shall drink of a liquor which comes from one single French word, and is none the worse for that, — from the word *grape;* this cider gives me the heartburn. Allow me to inquire of our host if there is not a good bottle of Beaugency, or of the Céran growth, at the back of the large bins of his cellar."

The host, being called, immediately attended.

"Monsieur," interrupted the poet, "take care! We shall not have time to drink the wine, unless we make great haste, for I must take advantage of the tide to take the boat."

"What boat?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Why, the boat which sets out for Belle-Isle."

"Ah! for Belle-Isle?" said the musketeer; "that is good."

"Bah! you will have plenty of time, Monsieur," replied the hotel-keeper, uncorking the bottle; "the boat will not leave this hour."

"But who will give me notice?" said the poet.

"Your neighbor," replied the host.

"But I scarcely know him."

"When you hear him going, it will be time for you to go."

"Is he going to Belle-Isle too?"

"Yes."

"The Monsieur who has a lackey?" asked D'Artagnan. "He is some gentleman, no doubt?"

"I know nothing of him."

"How! — know nothing of him?"

"No; all I know is, that he is drinking the same wine as this."

"*Peste!* that is a great honor for us," said D'Artagnan, filling his companion's glass, while the host went out.

"So," resumed the poet, returning to his ruling ideas, "you never saw any printing done?"

"Never."

"Well, then, take the letters thus, which compose the word, you see: *A b;* here is an *r*, two *e*'s, then a *g;*" and he arranged the letters with a swiftness and skill which did not escape the eye of D'Artagnan.

"*Abrégé*," said he, as he ended.

"Good!" said D'Artagnan. "Here are plenty of letters got together; but how are they kept so?" and he poured out a second glass for his host. M. Jupenet smiled like a man who has an answer for everything; then he pulled out — still from his pocket — a little metal instrument composed of two parts, arranged at right angles, against

which he put together in a straight line the characters, holding them under his left thumb.

"And what do you call that little iron ruler?" said D'Artagnan; "for, I suppose, all these things must have names."

"This is called a composing-stick," said Jupenet; "it is by the aid of this rule that the lines are formed."

"Come, then, I was not mistaken in what I said; you have a press in your pocket," said D'Artagnan, laughing with an air of simplicity so stupid that the poet was completely his dupe.

"No," replied he; "but I am too lazy to write, and when I have a verse in my head, I set it up all ready for printing. That is a labor spared."

"*Mordioux!*" thought D'Artagnan to himself, "this must be cleared up;" and under a pretext, which did not embarrass the musketeer, who was fertile in expedients, he left the table, went downstairs, ran to the shed under which stood the poet's little cart, and poked the point of his poniard into the stuff which enveloped one of the packages, which he found full of types, like those which the printer-poet had in his pocket.

"Humph!" said D'Artagnan, "I do not yet know whether M. Fouquet wishes to fortify Belle-Isle materially; but, at all events, here are some spiritual munitions for the castle." Then, rich in his discovery, he ran upstairs again to resume his place at the table.

D'Artagnan had learned what he wished to know. He none the less, however, remained face to face with his partner, to the moment when they heard from the next room the stirring about of a person ready to go out. The printer was immediately on foot; he had given orders for his horse to be harnessed. His carriage was waiting at the door. The second traveller got into his

saddle, in the courtyard, with his lackey. D'Artagnan followed Jupenet to the door. The printer embarked his cart and horse on board the boat. As to the opulent traveller, he did the same with his two horses and his servant. But all the wit D'Artagnan employed in endeavoring to find out his name was lost; he could learn nothing. Only, he took such notice of his countenance, that that countenance was engraved upon his memory forever. D'Artagnan had a great inclination to embark with the two travellers; but an interest more powerful than curiosity — that of success — repelled him from the shore, and brought him back again to the hostelry. He entered with a sigh, and went to bed directly, in order to be ready early in the morning with fresh ideas and the counsel of the night.

CHAPTER XX.

D'ARTAGNAN CONTINUES HIS INVESTIGATIONS.

At daybreak D'Artagnan himself saddled Furet, who had fared sumptuously all the night, devouring the remainder of the corn left by his companions. The musketeer sifted all he could out of the host, whom he found cunning, mistrustful, and devoted, body and soul, to M. Fouquet. In order, then, not to awaken the suspicions of this man, he carried on his fable of being a probable purchaser of some salt-mines. To have embarked for Belle-Isle at La Roche-Bernard would have been to expose himself to comments which had perhaps been already made, and which would be carried to the castle. Moreover, it was singular that this traveller and his lackey should have remained a secret to D'Artagnan, in spite of all the questions addressed by him to the host, who appeared to know the man perfectly well. The musketeer then made some inquiries concerning the salt-mines, and took the road to the marshes, leaving the sea to his right, and penetrating into that vast and desolate plain which resembles a sea of mud, of which here and there a few crests of salt silver the undulations.

Furet progressed admirably, with his nervous little legs, along the foot-wide causeways which separate the salt-mines. D'Artagnan, aware of the consequences of a fall, which would result in a cold bath, allowed him to go as he liked, contenting himself with looking at three rocks in the distance, which rose up like lance-blades from the

bosom of the verdureless plain. Pirial, the market-town of Batz, and Le Croisic, exactly resembling each other, attracted and held his attention. If the traveller turned round, the better to make his observations, he saw in the other direction three other steeples, — Guérande, Le Poulighen, and St. Joachim, — which in their circumference represented a set of skittles, of which he and Furet were but the wandering ball. Pirial was the first little port on his right. He went thither, with the names of the principal salters in his mouth. At the moment when he arrived at the little port of Pirial, five large barges, laden with stone, were leaving it. It appeared strange to D'Artagnan that stones should be leaving a country where none are found. He had recourse to all of M. Agnan's affability to learn from the people of the port the cause of this singularity. An old fisherman replied to M. Agnan, that the stones very certainly did not come from Pirial or the marshes.

"Where do they come from, then?" naïvely asked the musketeer.

"Monsieur, they come from Nantes and Paimbœuf."

"Where are they going, then?"

"Monsieur, to Belle-Isle."

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan, in the same tone he had assumed to tell the printer that his characters interested him; "are they building at Belle-Isle, then?"

"Why, yes, Monsieur; M. Fouquet has the walls of the castle repaired every year."

"Is it in ruins, then?"

"It is old."

"Thank you. The fact is," said D'Artagnan to himself, "nothing is more natural; every proprietor has a right to repair his property. It would be like telling me that I was fortifying the Image de Notre-Dame, when

I should be purely and simply obliged to make repairs. In truth, I believe false reports have been made to his Majesty, and he is very likely to be in the wrong."

"You must confess," continued he then, aloud, addressing the fisherman, — for his rôle of a suspicious man was imposed upon him by the very object of his mission, — "you must confess, my dear Monsieur, that those stones travel in a very curious fashion."

"How so?" said the fisherman.

"They come from Nantes or Paimbœuf by the Loire, do they not?"

"That is descending."

"That is convenient, — I don't say it is not; but why do they not go straight from St. Nazaire to Belle-Isle?"

"Eh! because the barges are bad boats, and are not seaworthy," replied the fisherman.

"That is not a reason."

"Pardon me, Monsieur, one may see that you have never been a sailor," added the fisherman, not without a sort of disdain.

"Pray explain that to me, my good man. It seems to me that to come from Paimbœuf to Pirial, and go from Pirial to Belle-Isle, is as if we went from La Roche-Bernard to Nantes, and from Nantes to Pirial."

"By water that would be the nearest way," replied the fisherman, imperturbably.

"But there is an elbow?"

The fisherman shook his head.

"The shortest road from one place to another is the straight line," continued D'Artagnan.

"You forget the tide, Monsieur."

"Well, take the tide."

"And the wind."

"Well, and the wind."

"Without doubt; the current of the Loire carries boats almost as far as Le Croisic. If they want to be repaired a little, or to recruit the crew, they come to Pirial along the coast; from Pirial they find another inverse current, which carries them to the Isle-Dumet, two leagues and a half."

"Granted."

"There the current of the Vilaine throws them upon another isle, the isle of Hoedic?"

"I agree to that."

"Well, Monsieur, from that isle to Belle-Isle the way is quite straight. The sea, broken both above and below, passes like a canal, like a mirror, between the two isles; the barges glide along upon it, don't you see, like ducks upon the Loire."

"It does not signify," said the obstinate M. Agnan; "it is very far about."

"Ah, yes; but M. Fouquet will have it so," replied the fisherman in conclusion, taking off his woollen cap at the enunciation of that respected name.

A look from D'Artagnan, a look as keen and piercing as a sword-blade, found nothing in the heart of the old man but simple confidence, on his features nothing but satisfaction and indifference. He said, "M. Fouquet will have it so," as he would have said, "God has willed it."

D'Artagnan had already gone too far in this direction; besides, the barges having departed, there remained at Pirial nothing but a single boat, — that of the old man, — and it did not look fit for sea without great preparation. D'Artagnan therefore aroused Furet, who, as a new proof of his charming character, resumed his march, with his feet in the salt-mines, and his nose to the dry wind which bends the furze and the scanty heather of this country. D'Artagnan reached Le Croisic about five o'clock.

If D'Artagnan had been a poet, it would have been a beautiful spectacle, that of the immense strand of a league or more, which the sea covers at high tide, and which at the reflux appears gray, desolate, spread over with star-fishes and dead seaweed, with its pebbles sparse and white, like the bones in some vast cemetery. But the soldier, the politician, and the ambitious man had no longer the sweet consolation of looking towards heaven, to read there a hope or a warning. A red sky signifies nothing to such men but wind and storm. White and fleecy clouds upon the azure only say that the sea will be smooth and peaceful. D'Artagnan found the sky blue, the breeze balmy with saline perfumes, and he said, "I will embark with the first tide, if it be but in a nutshell."

At Le Croisic, as at Pirial, he had noticed enormous heaps of stone lying along the strand. These gigantic walls, demolished at every tide by the transports going to Belle-Isle, were, in the eyes of the musketeer, the consequence and the proof of what he had so well divined at Pirial. Was it a wall that M. Fouquet was rebuilding? — was it a fortification that he was erecting? To ascertain this, he must see it. D'Artagnan put Furet into a stable, supped, went to bed, and on the morrow took a walk upon the quay, or rather upon the shingle. Le Croisic has a quay fifty feet long; it has a look-out which resembles an enormous *brioche* [a kind of cake] elevated on a dish. The flat strand is the dish. Hundreds of barrowsful of earth, solidified with the pebbles, and rounded into cones, with sinuous passages between, make the look-out and the *brioche* at the same time. It is so now, it was so two hundred years ago; only, the *brioche* was less large, and probably there were not to be seen trellises of lath around the *brioche*, which constitute the ornament of it, and which the ædileship of that poor and pious little market-town

has planted like hand-rails along the snail-like passages winding towards the little terrace. Upon the shingle were three or four fishermen talking about sardines and shrimps. D'Artagnan, his eye animated with rough gayety, and a smile upon his lips, approached these fishermen.

"Any fishing going on to-day?" said he.

"Yes, Monsieur," replied one of them; "we are only waiting for the tide."

"Where do you fish, my friends?"

"Upon the coasts, Monsieur."

"Which are the best coasts?"

"Ah, that depends upon circumstances. Around the isles, for example."

"Yes; but they are a long way off, those isles, are they not?"

"Not very; four leagues."

"Four leagues! That is a voyage."

The fishermen laughed out in M. Agnan's face.

"Hear me, then," said the latter, with an air of simple stupidity; "four leagues off you lose sight of land, do you not?"

"Why, not always."

"Ah! it is a long way, — too long, or else I would have asked you to take me aboard, and to show me what I have never seen."

"What is that?"

"A live sea-fish."

"Monsieur is from the province?" said a fisherman.

"Yes, I come from Paris."

The Breton shrugged his shoulders; then, "Have you ever seen M. Fouquet in Paris?" asked he.

"Often," replied D'Artagnan.

"Often!" repeated the fishermen, closing their circle round the Parisian. "Do you know him?"

"A little; he is the intimate friend of my master."

"Ah!" exclaimed the fishermen.

"And," said D'Artagnan, "I have seen his châteaux at St. Mandé and at Vaux, and his hotel in Paris."

"Is that a fine place?"

"Superb."

"It is not so fine a place as Belle-Isle," said a fisherman.

"Bah!" replied M. Agnan, breaking into a laugh so disdainful that he angered all his auditors.

"It is very plain that you have never seen Belle-Isle," returned the most curious of the fishermen. "Do you know that there are six leagues of it, and that there are such trees on it as cannot be equalled even at Nantes-sur-le-Fossé?"

"Trees in the sea!" cried D'Artagnan. "Well, I should like to see them."

"That can be easily done. We are fishing at the Isle de Hoedic, — come with us. From that place you will see, as a Paradise, the black trees of Belle-Isle against the sky; you will see the white line of the castle, which cuts the horizon of the sea like a blade."

"Oh," said D'Artagnan, "that must be fine! But do you know there are a hundred belfries at M. Fouquet's château at Vaux?"

The Breton raised his head in profound admiration, but he was not convinced. "A hundred belfries! That may be; but Belle-Isle is finer than that. Would you like to see Belle-Isle?"

"Is that possible?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Yes, with the permission of the governor."

"But I do not know the governor."

"As you know M. Fouquet, you can tell your name."

"Oh, my friends, I am not a gentleman."

"Everybody enters Belle-Isle," continued the fisherman, in his strong, pure language, "provided he means no harm to Belle-Isle or its master."

A slight shudder passed over the body of the musketeer. "That is true," thought he; then recovering himself, "if I were sure," said he, "not to be sea-sick."

"What! upon her?" said the fisherman, pointing with pride to his pretty, round-bottomed boat.

"Well, you almost persuade me," cried M. Agnan; "I will go and see Belle-Isle, but they will not admit me."

"We shall enter, safe enough."

"You! What for?"

"Why, *dame!* to sell fish to the corsairs."

"Hey! corsairs! — what do you mean?"

"I mean that M. Fouquet is having two corsairs built to chase the Dutch or the English, and we sell our fish to the crews of those little vessels."

"Come, come!" said D'Artagnan to himself; "better and better. A printing-press, bastions, and corsairs! Well, M. Fouquet is not an enemy to be despised, as I had presumed. He is worth the trouble of travelling to see him nearer."

"We set out at half-past five," added the fisherman, gravely.

"I am quite ready, and I will not leave you now." So D'Artagnan saw the fishermen haul their boats with a windlass to meet the tide. The tide came in. M. Agnan managed to climb on board, not without feigning a little fear and awkwardness, to the amusement of the young sea-urchins who watched him with their large intelligent eyes. He lay down upon a folded sail, and remained entirely inactive, while the boat prepared for sea; within two hours it was ready to sail. The fishermen, who pros-

ecuted their occupation as they proceeded, did not perceive that their passenger had not become pale, had neither groaned nor suffered; that, in spite of the horrible tossing and rolling of the boat, to which no hand imparted direction, the novice passenger had preserved his presence of mind and his appetite. They fished, and their fishing was sufficiently fortunate. To lines baited with prawns, soles and plaice came, with numerous gambols, to bite. Two nets had already been broken by the immense weight of congers and cod; three sea-eels ploughed the hold with their slimy folds in their dying contortions. D'Artagnan brought them good luck; they told him so. The soldier found the occupation so pleasant that he put his hand to the work — that is to say, to the lines — and uttered roars of joy, and *mordioux* enough to have astonished his musketeers themselves, every time that a shock given to his line by a captured prey tugged at the muscles of his arm, and required the employment of his strength and skill. The pleasure party had made him forget his diplomatic mission. He was struggling with a frightful conger, and holding fast with one hand to the side of the vessel in order to seize with the other the gaping jowl of his antagonist, when the skipper said to him, "Take care they don't see you from Belle-Isle!"

These words produced the same effect upon D'Artagnan as the hissing of the first bullets on a day of battle: he let go of both line and conger, which, one dragging the other, returned again to the water. D'Artagnan perceived, within half a league at most, the blue and marked profile of the rocks of Belle-Isle, overtowered by the white and majestic line of the castle; in the distance, the land with its forests and verdant plains; in the pastures, cattle. This was what first attracted the attention of the musketeer. The sun, risen half-way to the meridian, darted its

rays of gold upon the sea, raising a shining mist or dust around this enchanted isle. Nothing could be seen of it, owing to this dazzling light, but the flattened points; every shadow was strongly marked, and striped with a band of darkness the luminous sheet of the fields and the walls. "Well!" said D'Artagnan, at the aspect of those masses of black rocks, "these are fortifications, it seems to me, which do not stand in need of any engineer to render a landing difficult. Where the devil could a landing be effected on that isle which God has defended so completely?"

"This way," replied the skipper of the boat, changing the sail, and imparting to the rudder a twist which turned the boat in the direction of a pretty little harbor, quite coquettish, quite round, and quite newly battlemented.

"What the devil do I see yonder?" said D'Artagnan.

"You see Locmaria," replied the fisherman.

"Well, but there?"

"That is Bangos."

"And farther on?"

"Saujen, and then the palace."

"*Mordioux!* it is a world! Ah! there are some soldiers."

"There are seventeen hundred men in Belle-Isle, Monsieur," replied the fisherman, proudly. "Do you know that the smallest garrison has twenty companies of infantry?"

"*Mordioux!*" cried D'Artagnan to himself, stamping with his foot; "his Majesty was right enough." They landed.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN WHICH THE READER, NO DOUBT, WILL BE AS ASTONISHED AS D'ARTAGNAN WAS TO MEET WITH AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

THERE is always in a landing, if it be only from the smallest sea-boat, a bustle and a confusion which do not leave to the mind the liberty which it needs in order to study at the first glance the new place that is presented to it. The movable bridges, the excited sailors, the noise of the water upon the pebbles, the cries and the importunities of those who are waiting on the shore, are the multiple details of that sensation which is summed up in one single word, — hesitation.

It was not, then, till after D'Artagnan had disembarked and stood several minutes on the shore that he saw at the harbor, but more particularly in the interior of the isle, an immense number of workmen in motion. At his feet he recognized the five barges laden with rough stone which he had seen leave the port of Pirial. The stones were transported to the shore by means of a chain formed by twenty-five or thirty peasants. The large stones were loaded upon carts which conveyed them in the same direction as the shards, — that is to say, towards the works, of which D'Artagnan could as yet appreciate neither the strength nor the extent. Everywhere prevailed an activity equal to that which Telemachus observed on his landing at Salentum.

D'Artagnan felt a strong inclination to penetrate into

the interior; but he could not, without danger of exciting mistrust, exhibit too much curiosity. He advanced, then, with exceeding caution, scarcely going beyond the line formed by the fishermen on the beach, observing everything, saying nothing, and meeting all suspicions that might have been excited with a half-silly question or a polite bow. And yet, while his companions carried on their trade, giving or selling their fish to the workmen or the inhabitants of the town, D'Artagnan had gained ground by degrees, and, reassured by the little attention paid to him, began to cast an intelligent and confident look upon the men and things that appeared before his eyes. And his very first glance fell upon earthworks in which the eye of a soldier could not be mistaken. In the first place, at the two extremities of the port, in order to cover the great axis of the ellipsis formed by the basin, two batteries had been raised, evidently destined to receive flank pieces; for D'Artagnan saw the workmen finishing the platforms and making ready the half-circle of wood upon which the wheels of the pieces might turn so as to command every direction over the ramparts. By the side of each of these batteries other workmen were strengthening gabions filled with earth, the lining of another battery. The latter had embrasures, and a superintendent of the works called up in succession the men who, with cords, tied the saucissons, and those who cut the lozenges and right angles of turf destined to retain the matting of the embrasures. By the activity displayed in these works, already so far advanced, they might be considered as completed; they were not yet furnished with their cannon, but the platforms had their beds and their planks all prepared; the earth, beaten carefully, had consolidated them; and, supposing the artillery to be on the island, in less than two or three days the port might be completely

armed. What astonished D'Artagnan, when he turned his eyes from the coast batteries to the fortifications of the town, was to see that Belle-Isle was defended by an entirely new system, of which he had often heard the Comte de la Fère speak as a great advancement, but of which he had never yet seen the application. These fortifications belonged neither to the Dutch method of Marollais, nor to the French method of the Chevalier Antoine de Ville, but to the system of Manesson Mallet, a skilful engineer, who about six or eight years before had quitted the service of Portugal to enter that of France. These works had the peculiarity that instead of rising above the earth, as did the ancient ramparts destined to defend a city from escalades, they, on the contrary, sank into it ; and the depth of the ditches served instead of the height of walls. It did not take long to make D'Artagnan perceive the superiority of such a system, which gives no advantage to cannon. Besides, as the ditches were lower than the sea, or on a level with it, they might be inundated by subterranean sluices. Otherwise, the works were almost complete ; and a group of workmen, receiving orders from a man who appeared to be the superintendent of the works, were occupied in placing the last stones. A bridge of planks, thrown over the ditch for greater convenience in using the barrows, joined the interior to the exterior. With an air of simple curiosity, D'Artagnan asked if he might be permitted to cross the bridge, and he was told that no order prevented it. Consequently he crossed the bridge, and advanced towards the group.

This group was superintended by the man whom D'Artagnan had already remarked, and who appeared to be the engineer-in-chief. A plan was lying open before him upon a large stone forming a table, and at some paces from him a crane was in action. This engineer, who by

his evident importance first attracted the attention of DArtagnan, wore a coat which from its sumptuousness was scarcely in harmony with the work he was employed in, which would rather have required the costume of a master mason than of a noble. He was, furthermore, a man of high stature and large square shoulders, and he wore a hat covered with plumes. He gesticulated in the most majestic manner, and appeared — for only his back was seen — to be scolding the workmen for their idleness and want of strength.

D'Artagnan continued to draw nearer. At that moment the man with the plumes had ceased to gesticulate, and, with his hands placed upon his knees, was following, half bent, the efforts of six workmen who were trying to raise a block of hewn stone to the top of a piece of timber destined to support the stone, so that the cord of the crane might be passed under it. The six men, all on one side of the stone, united their efforts to raise it eight or ten inches from the ground, sweating and blowing; while a seventh got ready, as soon as there should be daylight enough beneath it, to slide in the roller that was to support it. But the stone had already twice escaped from their hands before gaining a sufficient height for the roller to be introduced. It may well be believed that every time the stone escaped them, they bounded quickly backwards, to keep their feet from being crushed by the falling stone. Moreover, each time that the stone was relinquished by them, it sank deeper and deeper into the damp earth, which rendered the operation more and more difficult. A third effort was attended by no better success, but with increasing discouragement. And yet, when the six men were bent over the stone, the man with the plumes had himself, with a powerful voice, given the word of command, "Steady!" which

guides all manœuvres of strength. Then he drew himself up.

"Come now!" said he, "what is all this about? Have I to do with men of straw? *Corbœuf!* stand on one side, and you shall see how this is to be done."

"*Peste!*" said D'Artagnan, "will he pretend to raise that rock? That would be a sight worth looking at."

The workmen, as commanded by the engineer, drew back, crestfallen and shaking their heads, with the exception of the one who held the joist, who prepared to perform his office. The man with the plumes went up to the stone, stooped, slipped his hands under the face lying upon the ground, stiffened his herculean muscles, and without a jerk, but with a slow motion like that of a machine, lifted the end of the rock a foot from the ground. The workman who held the joist profited by the space thus given him, and slipped the roller under the stone.

"That 's the way," said the giant, not letting the rock fall again, but placing it upon its support.

"*Mordioux!*" cried D'Artagnan, "I know but one man capable of such a feat of strength."

"Hey?" said the colossus, turning round.

"Porthos!" murmured D'Artagnan, seized with amazement; "Porthos at Belle-Isle!"

On his part, the man with the plumes fixed his eyes upon the pretended steward, and, in spite of his disguise, recognized him. "D'Artagnan!" exclaimed he; and the color mounted to his face. "Hush!" said he to D'Artagnan.

"Hush!" in his turn said the musketeer.

In fact, if Porthos had just been discovered by D'Artagnan, D'Artagnan had just been discovered by Porthos. Their share in each other's particular secret struck them both at the same time. Nevertheless, the first move of the two men was to throw their arms round each other.

What they wished to conceal from the bystanders was not their friendship, but their names. But after the embrace came reflection.

"Why the devil is Porthos at Belle-Isle lifting stones?" said D'Artagnan; only, D'Artagnan uttered that question to himself in a low voice.

Less strong in diplomacy than his friend, Porthos thought aloud. "How the devil did you come to Belle-Isle?" asked he of D'Artagnan, "and what do you come to do here?"

It was necessary to reply without hesitation. To hesitate in his answer to Porthos would have been a check for which the self-love of D'Artagnan could never have consoled itself. "*Pardieu!* my friend, I am at Belle-Isle because you are here."

"Oh, bah!" said Porthos, visibly astounded by the statement, and seeking to account for it to himself, with that clearness of deduction which we know to be characteristic of him.

"Besides," continued D'Artagnan, unwilling to give his friend time to recollect himself, "I have been to see you at Pierrefonds."

"Indeed!"

"Yes."

"And you did not find me there?"

"No; but I found Mouston."

"Is he well?"

"*Peste!*"

"Well, but Mouston did not tell you I was here."

"Why should he not? Have I, perchance, deserved to lose his confidence?"

"No; but he did not know it."

"Well, that is a reason at least not offensive to my self-love."

"But how did you manage to find me?"

"My dear friend, a great noble, like you, always leaves traces of his passage; and I should think but poorly of myself if I were not sharp enough to follow the traces of my friends." This explanation, flattering as it was, did not entirely satisfy Porthos.

"But I left no traces behind me, as I came here disguised," said Porthos.

"Ah! You came disguised, did you?" said D'Artagnan.

"Yes."

"And how?"

"As a miller."

"And do you think a great noble like you, Porthos, can affect common manners so as to deceive people?"

"Well, I swear to you, my friend, that I played my part so well that everybody was deceived."

"Indeed! so well that I have not discovered and rejoined you?"

"Yes; but how have you discovered and rejoined me?"

"Stop a bit! I was going to tell you how. Do you imagine that Mouston — "

"Ah! it was that fellow, Mouston," said Porthos, gathering together those two triumphal arches which served him for eyebrows.

"But, stop, I tell you! It was no fault of Mouston's, because he was ignorant himself of where you were."

"I know he was; and that is why I am in such haste to understand — "

"Oh, how impatient you are, Porthos!"

"When I do not comprehend, I am terrible."

"Well, you will understand. Aramis wrote to you at Pierrefonds, did he not?"

"Yes."

"And he told you to come before the equinox."

"That is true."

"Well, that is it," said D'Artagnan, hoping that this reason would satisfy Porthos.

Porthos appeared to give himself up to violent mental labor. "Yes, yes," said he, "I understand. As Aramis told me to come before the equinox, you have understood that that was to join him. You then inquired where Aramis was, saying to yourself, 'Where Aramis is, there Porthos will be.' You have learned that Aramis was in Bretagne, and you said to yourself, 'Porthos is in Bretagne.'"

"Exactly! In truth, Porthos, I cannot tell why you have not turned soothsayer. So you understand that, arriving at La Roche-Bernard, I heard of the splendid fortifications going on at Belle-Isle. The account that they gave me raised my curiosity. I embarked in a fishing-boat, without dreaming that you were here. I came, and I saw a fine fellow lifting a stone which Ajax could not have stirred. I cried out, 'Nobody but the Baron de Bracieux could have performed such a feat of strength.' You heard me, you turned round, you recognized me, we embraced; and, faith! if you like, my dear friend, we will embrace again."

"Ah! now it is all explained," said Porthos; and he embraced D'Artagnan with so much affection as to deprive the musketeer of his breath for five minutes.

"Why, you are stronger than ever," said D'Artagnan, "and still, fortunately, in your arms."

Porthos greeted D'Artagnan with a gracious smile. During the five minutes in which D'Artagnan was recovering his breath, he reflected that he had a very difficult part to play. It was necessary that he should question without ever replying. By the time his respiration returned, his plan of the campaign had been made.

CHAPTER XXII.

WHEREIN THE IDEAS OF D'ARTAGNAN, AT FIRST VERY CONFUSED, BEGIN TO CLEAR UP A LITTLE.

D'Artagnan immediately took the offensive. "Now that I have told you all, dear friend, or rather now that you have guessed all, tell me what you are doing here, covered with dust and mud."

Porthos wiped his brow, and looked around him with pride. "Why, I should think," said he, "that you might see what I am doing here."

"No doubt, no doubt; you lift great stones."

"Oh, to show these idle fellows what a man is!" said Porthos, with contempt. "But you understand —"

"Yes; that it is not your place to lift stones, although there are many, whose place it is, who cannot lift them as you do. It was that which made me ask you, just now, what you are doing here, Baron."

"I am studying topography, Chevalier."

"You are studying topography?"

"Yes; but you — what are you doing in that common dress?"

D'Artagnan perceived he had committed a fault in giving expression to his astonishment. Porthos had taken advantage of it, to retort with a question. Fortunately D'Artagnan was expecting this question. "Why," said he, "you know I am a bourgeois, in fact; my dress, then, has nothing astonishing in it, since it conforms to my condition."

"Nonsense! you are a musketeer."

"You are wrong, my friend; I have given in my resignation."

"Bah!"

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* yes."

"And have you abandoned the service?"

"I have quitted it."

"You have abandoned the king?"

"Quite."

Porthos raised his arms towards heaven, like a man who has heard extraordinary news. "Well, that does confound me," said he.

"It is nevertheless true."

"And what could have led you to form such a resolution?"

"The king displeased me. Mazarin had disgusted me for a long time, as you know; so I threw my uniform to the nettles."

"But Mazarin is dead."

"I know that well enough, *parbleu!* Only, at the period of his death, my resignation had been given in and accepted two months. Then, feeling myself free, I set off for Pierrefonds, to see my dear Porthos. I had heard of the happy division you had made of your time, and I wished for a fortnight to divide mine after your fashion."

"My friend, you know that it is not for a fortnight the house is open to you; it is for a year, — for ten years, — for life."

"Thank you, Porthos."

"Ah! you don't want any money, do you?" said Porthos, making something like fifty louis chink in his pocket. "In that case, you know —"

"No, thank you; I am not in want of anything. I

placed my savings with Planchet, who pays me the interest of them."

"Your savings?"

"Yes, to be sure," said D'Artagnan; "why should I not put by savings, as well as another, Porthos?"

"Oh, there is no reason why; on the contrary, I always suspected you — that is to say, Aramis always suspected you — to have savings. For my own part, d' ye see, I take no concern about the management of my household; but I presume the savings of a musketeer must be small."

"No doubt, relative to yourself, Porthos, who are a millionnaire; but you shall judge. I had laid by twenty-five thousand livres."

"That 's pretty well," said Porthos, with an affable air.

"And," continued D'Artagnan, "on the 28th of last month I added to it two hundred thousand livres more."

Porthos opened his great eyes, which eloquently demanded of the musketeer, "Where the devil did you steal such a sum as that, my dear friend?" "Two hundred thousand livres!" cried he, at length.

"Yes; which, with the twenty-five I had, and twenty thousand I have about me, complete the sum of two hundred and forty-five thousand livres."

"But tell me, whence comes this fortune?"

"I will tell you all about it presently, dear friend; but as you have, in the first place, many things to tell me yourself, let us place my narration in its proper rank."

"Bravo!" said Porthos; "then we are both rich. But what can I have to tell you?"

"You have to tell me how Aramis came to be named —"

"Ah! bishop of Vannes."

"That 's it," said D'Artagnan, "bishop of Vannes. Dear Aramis! do you know how he succeeded so well?"

"Yes, yes; without considering that he does not mean to stop there."

"What! do you think he will not be contented with violet stockings, and that he wants a red hat?"

"Hush! that is promised him."

"Bah! by the king?"

"By somebody more powerful than the king."

"Oh, the devil! Porthos, what incredible things you tell me, my friend!"

"Why incredible? Is there not always somebody in France more powerful than the king?"

"Oh, yes! in the time of King Louis XIII. it was the Duc de Richelieu; in the time of the regency it was Cardinal Mazarin; in the time of Louis XIV; it is M. —"

"Go on."

"It is M. Fouquet."

"Jove! you have hit it the first time."

"So it is M. Fouquet who has promised Aramis the hat?"

Porthos assumed an air of reserve. "Dear friend," said he, "God preserve me from meddling with the affairs of others, above all from revealing secrets it may be to their interests to keep! When you see Aramis, he will tell you what he thinks he ought to tell you."

"You are right, Porthos; and you are quite a padlock for safety. But to revert to yourself?"

"Yes," said Porthos.

"You said just now that you came hither to study topography?"

"I did so."

"*Tudieu!* my friend, what fine things you will do!"

"How do you mean?"

"Why, these fortifications are admirable."

"Is that your opinion?"

"Certainly. In truth, to anything but a regular siege, Belle-Isle is impregnable."

Porthos rubbed his hands. "That is my opinion," said he.

"But who the devil has fortified this paltry little place in this manner?"

Porthos drew himself up proudly: "Did not I tell you who?"

"No."

"Do you not suspect?"

"No; all that I can say is that he is a man who has studied all the systems, and who appears to me to have stopped at the best."

"Hush!" said Porthos; "consider my modesty, my dear d'Artagnan!"

"Really," replied the musketeer, "can it be you — who — oh!"

"Pray, my dear friend —"

"You who have imagined, traced, and contrived these bastions, these redans, these curtains, these half-moons, and are preparing that covered way?"

"I beg you —"

"You who have built that lunette with its retiring angles and its salient angles?"

"My friend —"

"You who have given that inclination to the openings of your embrasures, by means of which you so effectively protect the men who serve the guns?"

"Eh! *mon Dieu!* yes."

"Oh, Porthos, Porthos! I must bow down before you, I must admire you! But you have always con-

cealed from us this superior genius. `I hope, my dear friend, you will show me all this in detail?"

"Nothing more easy. There is my plan."

"Show it me."

Porthos led D'Artagnan towards the stone which served him for a table, and upon which the plan was spread. At the foot of the plan was written, in the formidable writing of Porthos, of which we have already had occasion to speak: —

"Instead of making use of the square or rectangle, as has been done up to this time, you will suppose your place enclosed in a regular hexagon, this polygon having the advantage of offering more angles than the quadrilateral. Every side of your hexagon, of which you will determine the length in proportion to the dimensions taken upon the place, will be divided into two parts, and upon the middle point you will draw a perpendicular towards the centre of the polygon, which will equal in length the sixth part of the side. At the extremities of each side of the polygon, you will trace two diagonals, which will cut the perpendicular. These two straight lines will form the lines of defence."

"The devil!" said D'Artagnan, stopping at this point of the demonstration; "why, this is a complete system, Porthos."

"Entirely," said Porthos. "Do you wish to continue?"

"No, I have read enough of it; but since it is you, my dear Porthos, who direct the works, what need have you of setting down your system so formally in writing?"

"Oh, my dear friend, death!"

"How! death?"

"Why, we are all mortal."

"That is true," said D'Artagnan; "you have an answer for everything, my friend;" and he replaced the plan upon the stone.

But however short the time he had the plan in his hands, D'Artagnan had been able to distinguish, under the enormous writing of Porthos, a much more delicate hand, which reminded him of certain letters to Marie Michon, with which he had been acquainted in his youth. Only, the India-rubber had passed and repassed over this writing, so that it might have escaped a less practised eye than that of our musketeer.

"Bravo! my friend, bravo!" said D'Artagnan.

"And now you know all that you want to know, do you not?" said Porthos, wheeling about.

"*Mon Dieu*, yes; only do me one last favor, dear friend!"

"Speak! I am master here."

"Do me the pleasure to tell me the name of that gentleman who is walking yonder."

"Where? there?"

"Behind the soldiers."

"Followed by a lackey?"

"Exactly."

"In company with a mean sort of fellow dressed in black?"

"Yes; I mean him."

"That is M. Gétard?"

"And who is Gétard, my friend?"

"He is the architect of the house."

"Of what house?"

"Of M. Fouquet's house."

"Ah!" cried D'Artagnan; "you are of the household of M. Fouquet, then, Porthos?"

"I! what do you mean by that?" said the topographer, blushing to the tips of his ears.

"Why, you say 'the house,' when speaking of Belle-Isle, as if you were speaking of the château of Pierrefonds."

Porthos bit his lips. "Belle-Isle, my friend," said he, "belongs to M. Fouquet, does it not?"

"Yes, I believe so."

"As Pierrefonds belongs to me?"

"Certainly."

"You have been at Pierrefonds?"

"I told you that I was there not two months ago."

"Did you ever see a man there who is accustomed to walk about with a ruler in his hand?"

"No; but I might have seen him there, if he really walked there."

"Well, that gentleman is M. Boulingrin."

"Who is M. Boulingrin?"

"Now we come to it. If, when this gentleman is walking with a ruler in his hand, any one should ask me, 'Who is M. Boulingrin?' I should reply: 'He is the architect of the house.' Well! M. Gétard is the Boulingrin of M. Fouquet. But he has nothing to do with the fortifications, which are my department alone, do you understand? — absolutely nothing."

"Ah, Porthos," exclaimed D'Artagnan, letting his arms fall as a conquered man gives up his sword; "ah, my friend, you are not only a herculean topographer, you are, still further, a dialectician of the first water."

"Was it not powerfully reasoned?" said Porthos; and he puffed and blew like the conger which D'Artagnan had let slip from his hand that morning.

"And now," continued D'Artagnan, "that shabby-looking man who accompanies M. Gétard, is he also of the household of M. Fouquet?"

"Oh, yes," said Porthos, with contempt; "it is one M. Jupenet, or Juponet, a sort of poet."

"Who has come to establish himself here?"

"I believe so."

"I thought M. Fouquet had poets enough, yonder, — Scudéri, Loret, Pellisson, La Fontaine? If I must tell you the truth, Porthos, that poet disgraces you."

"Eh! my friend; but what saves us is that he is not here as a poet."

"As what, then, is he?"

"As printer. And you make me remember that I have a word to say to the dirty pedant."

"Say it, then."

Porthos made a sign to Jupenet, who clearly recognized D'Artagnan, and did not care to come nearer, — which naturally produced another sign from Porthos. This was so imperative that he was obliged to obey. As he approached, "Come hither!" said Porthos. "You landed only yesterday, and you have begun your tricks already."

"How so, Monsieur the Baron?" asked Jupenet, trembling.

"Your press was groaning all night, Monsieur," said Porthos, "and you prevented my sleeping, *corbœuf!*"

"Monsieur — " objected Jupenet, timidly.

"You have nothing yet to print; therefore you have no occasion to set your press going. What did you print last night?"

"Monsieur, a light poem of my own composition."

"Light! Nonsense, Monsieur; the press groaned pitifully with it. Let that not happen again!"

"No, Monsieur."

"You promise me?"

"I do, Monsieur."

"Very well; this time I pardon you. Adieu!"

The poet withdrew with the same humility he had exhibited on coming up.

"Well, now we have combed that fellow's head, let us breakfast."

"Yes," replied D'Artagnan, "let us breakfast."

"Only," said Porthos, "I beg you to observe, my friend, that we have only two hours for our repast."

"What would you have? We will try to make it answer. But why have you only two hours?"

"Because it is high tide at one o'clock, and with the tide I am going to start for Vannes. But as I shall return to-morrow, my dear friend, you can stay here. You shall be master. I have a good cook and a good cellar."

"No," interrupted D'Artagnan; "better than that!"

"What?"

"You are going to Vannes, you say?"

"To a certainty."

"To see Aramis?"

"Yes."

"Well, I came from Paris on purpose to see Aramis."

"That 's true."

"I will go with you, then."

"Do; that 's the thing."

"Only, I ought to have seen Aramis first, and you after. But man proposes, and God disposes. I have begun with you, and will finish with Aramis."

"Very well."

"And in how many hours can you go from hence to Vannes?"

"Oh! *pardieu!* in six hours. Three hours by sea from here to Sarzeau, three hours by road from Sarzeau to Vannes."

"How convenient that is! Being so near to the bishopric, do you often go to Vannes?"

"Yes; once a week. But stop till I get my plan."

Porthos picked up his plan, folded it carefully, and engulfed it in his large pocket.

"Good!" said D'Artagnan, aside; "I think I now know the true engineer who is fortifying Belle-Isle."

Two hours after, at high tide, Porthos and D'Artagnan set out for Sarzeau.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A PROCESSION AT VANNES.

The passage from Belle-Isle to Sarzeau was made rapidly enough, thanks to one of those little corsairs of which D'Artagnan had been told during his voyage, and which, shaped for fast sailing and destined for the chase, were sheltered at that time in the road of Locmaria, where one of them, with a quarter of its war-crew, did service between Belle-Isle and the Continent. D'Artagnan had an opportunity of convincing himself once more that Porthos, though engineer and topographer, was not deeply versed in affairs of State. His entire ignorance, with any other, might have passed for well-informed dissimulation. But D'Artagnan knew too well all the folds and the refolds of his Porthos not to find a secret if there were one there, — like those regular, minute old bachelors, who know how to find, with their eyes shut, each book on the shelves of their library, and each piece of linen in the drawers of their commode. Then, if he had found nothing, that sly D'Artagnan, in rolling and unrolling his Porthos, it was because, in truth, there was nothing to be found.

"Be it so," said D'Artagnan; "I shall know more at Vannes in half an hour than Porthos has known at Belle-Isle in two months. Only, in order that I may know something, it is important that Porthos does not make use of the only stratagem I leave at his disposal. He must not warn Aramis of my arrival."

All the vigilance of the musketeer was then, for the moment, devoted to watching Porthos. And let us

hasten to say, Porthos did not deserve all this mistrust. Porthos had no thoughts of evil. Perhaps, on first seeing him, D'Artagnan had inspired him with a little suspicion; but almost immediately D'Artagnan had reconquered in that good and brave heart the place he had always occupied, and not the least cloud darkened the great eye of Porthos, fixed from time to time with fondness on his friend.

On landing, Porthos inquired if his horses were waiting, and he soon perceived them at the crossing of the road which turns round Sarzeau, and which, without passing through that little town, leads towards Vannes. These horses were two in number, — one for M. du Vallon, and one for his equerry; for Porthos had an equerry since Mousqueton could use only a carriage as a means of locomotion. D'Artagnan expected that Porthos would propose to send forward his equerry upon one horse to bring back another horse, and he (D'Artagnan) had made up his mind to oppose this proposition. But nothing which D'Artagnan had expected happened. Porthos simply ordered the servant to dismount and await his return at Sarzeau, while D'Artagnan would ride his horse, — which was done.

"Eh! but you are quite a man of foresight, my dear Porthos," said D'Artagnan to his friend, when he found himself in the saddle upon the equerry's horse.

"Yes; but this is a kindness on the part of Aramis. I have not my stud here, and Aramis has placed his stables at my disposal."

"Good horses for bishop's horses, *mordioux!*" said D'Artagnan. "It is true, Aramis is a bishop of a peculiar kind."

"He is a holy man!" replied Porthos, in a tone almost nasal, raising his eyes towards heaven.

"Then he is much changed," said D'Artagnan; "for you and I have known him tolerably profane."

"Grace has touched him," said Porthos.

"Bravo!" said D'Artagnan; "that redoubles my desire to see him, this precious Aramis!" and he spurred his horse, which sprang off with renewed speed.

"*Peste!*" said Porthos, "if we go on at this rate, we shall take only one hour instead of two."

"To go how far do you say, Porthos?"

"Four leagues and a half."

"That will be a good pace."

"I could have embarked you on the canal, but the devil take rowers and boat-horses! The first are like tortoises, the second like snails; and when a man is able to put a good horse between his knees, that horse is worth more than rowers or any other means."

"You are right, — you, above all, Porthos, who always look magnificent on horseback."

"A little heavy, my friend; I was weighed the other day."

"And what do you weigh?"

"Three hundred-weight!" said Porthos, proudly.

"Bravo!"

"So that you must perceive that I am forced to choose horses whose loins are straight and wide; otherwise I break them down in two hours."

"Yes; giant's horses you must have, must you not?"

"You are very polite, my friend," replied the engineer, with affectionate majesty.

"As a case in point," replied D'Artagnan, "your horse seems to sweat already."

"*Dame!* it is hot. Ah! do you see Vannes now?"

"Yes, perfectly. It is a handsome city, apparently."

"Charming, — according to Aramis, at least; it is too

dark-colored to please me. But black seems to be considered handsome by artists; I am very sorry for it."

"Why so, Porthos?"

"Because I have lately had my château of Pierrefonds, which was gray with age, plastered white."

"Humph!" said D'Artagnan; "but white is more cheerful."

"Yes; but it is less august, as Aramis tells me. Fortunately there are dealers in black as well as white. I will have Pierrefonds replastered in black, that is all. If gray is handsome, you understand, my friend, black must be superb."

"*Dame!*" said D'Artagnan, "that appears logical."

"Were you never at Vannes, D'Artagnan?"

"Never."

"Then you do not know the city?"

"No."

"Well, look!" said Porthos, raising himself in his stirrups, which made the fore-quarters of his horse bend sadly; "do you see that spire in the sunlight yonder?"

"Yes, I see it plainly."

"That is the cathedral."

"Which is called —"

"St. Pierre. Now look again! In the faubourg on the left do you see another cross?"

"Perfectly well."

"That is St. Paterne, the parish preferred by Aramis."

"Indeed!"

"Without doubt. Saint Paterne, you see, passes for having been the first bishop of Vannes. It is true that Aramis pretends that he was not; but he is so learned that that may be only a paro — a para —"

"Paradox," said D'Artagnan.

"Precisely; thank you! My tongue trips, it is so hot."

"My friend," said D'Artagnan, "continue your interesting description, I beg. What is that large white building with many windows?"

"Oh! that is the college of the Jesuits. *Pardieu!* you have a lucky hand. Do you see, close to the college, a large house with steeples and turrets, and built in a handsome Gothic style, as that brute, M. Gétard, says?"

"Yes, I see. Well?"

"Well, that is where Aramis resides."

"What! does he not reside at the episcopal palace?"

"No; that is in ruins. The palace, likewise, is in the city, and Aramis prefers the faubourg. That is why, as I told you, he is partial to St. Paterne; St. Paterne is in the faubourg. Besides, there are in this faubourg a mall, a tennis-court, and a house of Dominicans, — see! the one whose handsome steeple rises to the heavens."

"Well?"

"Next, you see, the faubourg is like a separate city; it has its walls, its towers, its ditches; the quay is upon it, likewise, and the boats land at the quay. If our little corsair did not draw eight feet of water, we could have come full sail up to Aramis's windows."

"Porthos, Porthos," cried D'Artagnan, "you are a well of knowledge, a spring of ingenious and profound reflections. Porthos, you no longer surprise me; you confound me."

"Here we are, arrived," said Porthos, turning the conversation with his usual modesty.

"And high time we were," thought D'Artagnan, "for Aramis's horse is melting away like a horse of ice."

They entered almost at the same instant into the faubourg; but scarcely had they gone a hundred paces when they were surprised to find the streets strewed with leaves and flowers. Against the old walls of Vannes were hung

the oldest and the strangest tapestries of France. Over iron balconies fell long white sheets stuck all over with bouquets. The streets were deserted; it was plain that the whole population was assembled at one point. The blinds were closed, and the breeze penetrated into the houses under the hangings, which cast long black shadows between their places of issue and the walls. Suddenly, at the turning of a street, chants struck the ears of the newly arrived travellers. A crowd in holiday garb appeared through the vapors of incense which mounted to the heavens in blue flakes, and clouds of rose-leaves flew up as high as the first stories. Above all heads were to be seen the cross and banners, the sacred symbols of religion. Then, beneath those crosses and banners, as if protected by them, was a whole world of young girls, clothed in white, and crowned with corn-flowers. At the two sides of the street, enclosing the *cortége*, marched the guards of the garrison, carrying bouquets in the barrels of their muskets and on the points of their lances. This was a procession.

While D'Artagnan and Porthos were looking on with becoming pious ardor, which disguised an extreme impatience to push forward, a magnificent daïs approached, preceded by a hundred Jesuits and a hundred Dominicans, and escorted by two archdeacons, a treasurer, a penitentiary, and twelve canons. A chanter with a thundering voice — a chanter certainly picked out from all the voices of France, as was the drum-major of the Imperial Guard from all the giants of the empire — a chanter escorted by four other chanters, who appeared to be there only to serve him as an accompaniment — made the air resound, and the windows of all the houses vibrate. Under the daïs appeared a pale and noble countenance, with black eyes, black hair streaked with threads

of silver, a delicate, compressed mouth, a prominent and angular chin. This head, full of graceful majesty, was covered with the episcopal mitre, — a head-dress which gave it, in addition to the character of sovereignty, that of asceticism and evangelic meditation.

"Aramis!" cried the musketeer, involuntarily, as this lofty countenance passed before him.

The prelate started at the sound of the voice. He raised his large black eyes with their long lashes, and turned them without hesitation towards the spot whence the exclamation proceeded. At a glance he saw Porthos and D'Artagnan close to him. On his part, D'Artagnan, thanks to the keenness of his sight, had seen all, grasped all. The full portrait of the prelate had entered his memory, never to leave it. One thing had particularly struck D'Artagnan. On perceiving him, Aramis had colored; then he had concentrated under his eyelids the fiery look of the master, and the affectionate look of the friend. It was evident that Aramis addressed this question to himself: "Why is D'Artagnan there with Porthos, and what does he want at Vannes?" Aramis comprehended all that was passing in the mind of D'Artagnan, on turning his look upon him again, and seeing that he had not lowered his eyes. He knew the acuteness and intelligence of his friend; he feared to let him divine the secret of his blush and his astonishment. He was still the same Aramis, always having a secret to conceal. Therefore, to put an end to this searching examination, which it was necessary to get rid of at all events, as at any price a general silences the fire of a battery which annoys him. Aramis stretched forth his beautiful white hand, upon which sparkled the amethyst of the pastoral ring; he cut the air with the sign of the cross, and poured out his benediction upon his two friends. Perhaps, thoughtful and

absent, D'Artagnan, impious in spite of himself, might not have bent beneath this holy benediction; but Porthos saw his distraction, and laying his friendly hand upon the back of his companion, crushed him down towards the earth. D'Artagnan was forced to give way; indeed, he was little short of being flat on the ground. In the mean time Aramis had passed. D'Artagnan, like Antæus, had only touched the ground, and he turned towards Porthos, quite ready to quarrel with him. But there was no mistaking the intention of the brave Hercules; it was a feeling of religious propriety that had influenced him. Besides, speech with Porthos, instead of disguising his thought, always revealed it.

"It is very polite of him," said he, "to have given his benediction to us alone. Decidedly, he is a holy man and a brave man."

Less convinced than Porthos, D'Artagnan made no reply.

"Observe, my friend," continued Porthos, "he has seen us; and instead of continuing to walk on at the simple pace of the procession, as he did just now, — see what a hurry he is in! Do you see how the *cortége* is increasing its speed? He is eager to come to us and to embrace us, is that dear Aramis!"

"That is true," replied D'Artagnan, aloud. Then to himself: "It is equally true that he has seen me, the fox, and will have time to prepare himself to receive me."

But the procession had passed; the road was free. D'Artagnan and Porthos walked straight up to the episcopal palace, which was surrounded by a numerous crowd, anxious to see the prelate return. D'Artagnan noticed that this crowd was composed principally of citizens and military men. He recognized in the character of these partisans his friend's address. Aramis was not the man

to seek for a useless popularity. He cared very little for being beloved by people who could be of no service to him. The train of ordinary pastors — that is to say, women, children, and old men — was not the train for him.

Ten minutes after the two friends had passed the threshold of the palace, Aramis returned like a triumphant conqueror; the soldiers presented arms to him as to a superior officer; the citizens bowed to him as to a friend and patron, rather than as a head of the Church. There was something in Aramis resembling those Roman senators who had their doors always surrounded by clients. At the foot of the steps he had a conference of half a minute with a Jesuit, who in order to speak to him more secretly passed his head under the daïs. He then entered his palace; the doors closed slowly, and the crowd melted away, while chants and prayers were still resounding abroad. It was a magnificent day. Earthly perfumes were mingled with the perfumes of the air and the sea. The city breathed happiness, joy, and strength. D'Artagnan felt something like the presence of an invisible hand which had, all-powerfully, created this strength, this joy, this happiness, and spread everywhere these perfumes.

"Oh!" said he to himself, "Porthos has got fat, but Aramis has grown taller."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE GRANDEUR OF THE BISHOP OF VANNES.

Porthos and D'Artagnan had entered the bishop's residence by a private door, as his personal friends. Of course, Porthos served D'Artagnan as guide. The worthy baron comported himself everywhere rather as if he were at home. Nevertheless, whether it was a tacit acknowledgment of the sanctity of the personage of Aramis and his character, or the habit of respecting him who exercised a moral influence over him, — a worthy habit which had always made Porthos a model soldier and an excellent companion, — for these reasons, say we, Porthos preserved in the palace of his Greatness the Bishop of Vannes a sort of reserve which D'Artagnan remarked at once in the attitude he took with respect to the valets and the officers. And yet this reserve did not go so far as to prevent his asking questions. Porthos questioned. They learned that his Greatness had just returned to his apartments, and was preparing to appear, in familiar intimacy, less majestic than he had appeared with his flock.

After a quarter of an hour, which D'Artagnan and Porthos passed in looking at the whites of each other's eyes, and twirling their thumbs in all possible different evolutions, a door of the hall opened, and his Greatness appeared, dressed in the undress complete of a prelate. Aramis carried his head high, like a man accustomed to command; his violet robe was tucked up on one side, and his hand was on his hip. He had retained the fine

mustache and the lengthened imperial of the time of Louis XIII. He exhaled, on entering, that delicate perfume which among elegant men and women of high fashion never changes, and appears to be incorporated in the person, of whom it has become the natural em anation. Only, in this case the perfume had retained something of the religious sublimity of incense. It no longer intoxicated, it penetrated; it no longer inspired desire, it inspired respect. Aramis, on entering the room, did not hesitate an instant; and without pronouncing one word, which whatever it might be would have been cold on such an occasion, he went straight up to the musketeer, so well disguised under the costume of M. Agnan, and pressed him in his arms with a tenderness which the most mistrustful could not have suspected of coldness or affectation.

D'Artagnan, on his part, embraced him with equal warmth. Porthos grasped the delicate hand of Aramis in his immense hands, and D'Artagnan noticed that his Greatness gave him his left hand, probably from habit, seeing that Porthos already a dozen times had injured his fingers, covered with rings, by bruising his flesh in the vice of his fist. Warned by the pain, Aramis was cautious, and presented only flesh to be bruised, and not fingers to be crushed against gold or the facets of diamonds.

Between two embraces, Aramis looked D'Artagnan in the face, offered him a chair, sitting down himself in the shade, observing that the light fell full upon the face of his interlocutor. The manœuvre, familiar to diplomatists and women, resembles much the advantage of the guard which, according to their skill or habit, combatants endeavor to take on the ground at a duel. D'Artagnan was not the dupe of this manœuvre; but he did not

appear to perceive it. He felt himself caught; but precisely because he was caught, he felt himself on the road to discovery, and it was of little moment to him, old *condottière* as he was, to be beaten in appearance, provided he drew from his pretended defeat the advantages of victory. It was Aramis who began the conversation.

"Ah, dear friend! my good D'Artagnan," said he, "what a fortunate chance!"

"It is a chance, my reverend companion," said D'Artagnan, "that I will call friendship. I seek you, as I always have sought you, when I had any grand enterprise to propose to you, or some hours of liberty to give you."

"Ah! indeed," said Aramis, with no outburst, "you have been seeking me?"

"Eh! yes, he has been seeking you, Aramis," said Porthos; "and the proof is that he has hunted me up at Belle-Isle. That is kind, is it not?"

"Ah! yes," said Aramis, "at Belle-Isle! certainly."

"Good!" thought D'Artagnan; "my booby Porthos, without thinking of it, has fired the first cannon of attack."

"At Belle-Isle!" said Aramis, "in that hole, in that desert! That is kind indeed!"

"And it was I who told him you were at Vannes," continued Porthos, in the same tone.

D'Artagnan set his lips with a subtilty almost ironical. "Yes, I knew, but I wished to see," replied he.

"To see what?"

"If our old friendship still held out; if on seeing each other our hearts, hardened as they are by age, would still let the old cry of joy escape, which welcomes the coming of a friend."

"Well, and you must have been satisfied," said Aramis.

"So, so."

"How is that?"

"Yes; Porthos said, 'Hush!' and you —"

"Well! and I?"

"And you gave me your benediction."

"What would you have, my friend?" said Aramis, smiling; "that is the most precious thing that a poor prelate, like me, has to give."

"Indeed, my dear friend!"

"Most certainly."

"And yet they say at Paris that the bishopric of Vannes is one of the best in France."

"Ah! you are now speaking of temporal wealth," said Aramis, with a careless air.

"To be sure, I wish to speak of that; I hold by it, on my part."

"In that case, let me speak of it," said Aramis, with a smile.

"You own yourself to be one of the richest prelates in France?"

"My friend, since you ask me to give you an account, I will tell you that the bishopric of Vannes is worth about twenty thousand livres a year, neither more nor less. It is a diocese which contains a hundred and sixty parishes."

"That is very pretty," said D'Artagnan.

"It is superb!" said Porthos.

"And yet," resumed D'Artagnan, throwing his eye over Aramis, "you have not buried yourself here forever?"

"Pardon me. Only, I do not admit the word 'buried.'"

"But it seems to me that at this distance from Paris a man is buried, or nearly so."

"My friend, I am getting old," said Aramis; "the noise and bustle of a city no longer suit me. At fifty-seven we ought to seek calm and meditation. I have

found them here. What is there more beautiful and stern at the same time, than this old Armorica? I find here, dear D'Artagnan, all that is unlike what I formerly loved; and that is what must happen at the end of life, which is unlike the beginning. A little of my old pleasure of former times still comes to greet me here, now and then, without diverting me from the way of salvation. I am still of this world, and yet every step that I take brings me nearer to God."

"Eloquent, wise, and discreet; you are an accomplished prelate, Aramis, and I offer you my congratulations."

"But," said Aramis, smiling, "you did not come here only for the purpose of paying me compliments. Speak! What brings you hither? May it be that, in some fashion or other, you want me?"

"Thank God, no, my friend," said D'Artagnan; "it is nothing of that kind, — I am rich and free."

"Rich!" exclaimed Aramis.

"Yes, rich for me; not for you, nor Porthos, understand. I have an income of about fifteen thousand livres."

Aramis looked at him suspiciously. He could not believe — particularly on seeing his old friend in such humble guise — that he had made so fine a fortune. Then D'Artagnan, seeing that the hour for explanations had come, related the story of his English adventures. During the narration he saw, a dozen times, the eyes of the prelate sparkle, and his slender fingers work convulsively. As to Porthos, it was not admiration he manifested for D'Artagnan, it was enthusiasm, it was delirium.

When D'Artagnan had finished, "Well!" said Aramis.

"Well!" said D'Artagnan, "you see that I have in England friends and property, in France a treasure. If your heart approves, I offer them to you. That is what I came here for."

However firm his look, he could not this time support that of Aramis. He therefore allowed his eye to stray towards Porthos, — like the sword which yields to too powerful a pressure and seeks another passage.

"At all events," said the bishop, "you have assumed a singular travelling costume, old friend."

"Frightful! I know it is. You may understand why I would not travel as a cavalier or a noble; since I became rich I am miserly."

"And you say, then, you came to Belle-Isle?" said Aramis, without transition.

"Yes," replied D'Artagnan; "I knew I should find you and Porthos there."

"Find me!" cried Aramis. "Me! During the year that I have been here I have not once crossed the sea."

"Oh," said D'Artagnan, "I did not know you were so domestic."

"Ah, dear friend, I must tell you that I am no longer the man of former times. Riding on horseback is unpleasant to me; the sea fatigues me. I am a poor ailing priest, always complaining, always grumbling, and inclined to the austerities which appear to accord with old age, — parleys with death. I abide, my dear D'Artagnan, I abide."

"Well, that is all the better, my friend; for we shall probably become neighbors."

"Bah!" said Aramis, with a degree of surprise he did not even seek to dissemble. "You, my neighbor!"

"*Mordioux!* yes."

"How so?"

"I am about to purchase some very profitable salt-mines, which are situated between Pirial and Le Croisic. Imagine, my friend, working at a clear profit of twelve per cent! Never any deficiency, never any idle expenses;

the ocean, faithful and regular, bringing every six hours its contingency to my coffers. I am the first Parisian who has dreamed of such a speculation. Do not divulge the matter, I beg of you, and in a short time we will communicate on the subject. I am to have three leagues of territory for thirty thousand livres."

Aramis darted a look at Porthos, as if to ask if all this were indeed true, if some snare were not concealed beneath this outward indifference. But soon, as if ashamed of having consulted this poor auxiliary, he collected all his forces for a fresh assault and a fresh defence. "I heard that you had had some difference with the Court," said he, "but that you had come out of it, as you know how to come out of everything, D'Artagnan, with the honors of war."

"I!" exclaimed the musketeer, with a great burst of laughter that could not conceal his embarrassment; for from these words, Aramis was not unlikely to be acquainted with his last relations with the king. — "I! oh, tell me all about that, pray, my dear Aramis?"

"Yes; it was related to me, a poor bishop lost in the middle of the moors, that the king had taken you as the confidant of his amours."

"With whom?"

"With Mademoiselle de Mancini."

D'Artagnan breathed freely again. "Ah! I don't say no to that," replied he.

"It appears that the king took you, one morning, over the bridge of Blois, to talk with his lady-love."

"That's true," said D'Artagnan. "And you know that, do you? Well, then, you must know that the same day I gave in my resignation."

"What, sincerely?"

"Nothing could be more sincere."

"It was then that you went to the Comte de la Fère's?"

"Yes."

"Afterwards to me?"

"Yes."

"And then to Porthos?"

"Yes."

"Was it in order to pay us a simple visit?"

"No; I did not know you were engaged, and I wished to take you with me into England."

"Yes, I understand; and then you executed alone, wonderful man! what you wanted to propose to us four to do. I suspected you had had something to do in that famous restoration, when I learned that you had been seen at King Charles's receptions, and that he spoke of you as a friend, or rather as a person to whom he was under an obligation."

"But how the devil could you learn all that?" demanded D'Artagnan, who began to fear that the investigations of Aramis would extend further than he wished.

"Dear D'Artagnan," said the prelate, "my friendship resembles, in a degree, the solicitude of that night-watch whom we have in the little tower of the mole, at the extremity of the quay. That brave man every night lights a lantern to direct the boats which come from sea. He is concealed in his watch-tower, and the fishermen do not see him; but he follows them with interest, he divines their presence, he calls them, he attracts them into the way to the port. I resemble this watcher; from time to time some news reaches me, and recalls to my remembrance all that I loved. Then I follow the friends of old days over the stormy ocean of the world, — I, a poor watcher, to whom God has kindly given the shelter of a watch-tower."

"Well, what did I do after I came from England?"

"Ah!" replied Aramis, "there you get out of my sight. I know nothing of you since your return, D'Artagnan; my sight grows thick. I regretted you did not think of me. I wept over your forgetfulness. I was wrong. I see you again; and it is a festival, a great festival, I assure you! How is Athos?"

"Very well, thank you."

"And our young pupil, Raoul?"

"He seems to have inherited the skill of his father, Athos, and the strength of his tutor, Porthos."

"And on what occasion have you been able to judge of that?"

"Eh! *mon Dieu!* the very day before my departure from Paris."

"Indeed! what was it?"

"Yes; there was an execution at the Grève, and in consequence of that execution, a riot. We happened, by accident, to be in the riot; and in this riot we were obliged to have recourse to our swords. And he did wonders."

"Bah! what did he do?"

"Why, in the first place, he threw a man out of the window as he would have thrown out a bale of cotton."

"Come, that's pretty well!" said Porthos.

"Then he drew, and cut and thrust away, as we fellows used to do in the good old times."

"And what was the cause of this riot?" inquired Porthos.

D'Artagnan noticed upon the face of Aramis a complete indifference to this question of Porthos. "Why," said he, fixing his eyes upon Aramis, "on account of two farmers of the revenues, friends of M. Fouquet, whom the king forced to disgorge their plunder, and then hanged."

A scarcely perceptible contraction of the prelate's brow showed that he had heard D'Artagnan's reply. "Oh!" said Porthos; "and what were the names of these friends of M. Fouquet?"

"Messieurs d'Eymeris and Lyodot," said D'Artagnan. "Do you know those names, Aramis?"

"No," said the prelate, disdainfully; "they sound like the names of financiers."

"Exactly; so they were."

"Oh! M. Fouquet allows his friends to be hanged, then?" cried Porthos.

"And why not?" said Aramis.

"Why, it seems to me —"

"If these culprits were hanged, it was by order of the king. Now, M. Fouquet, although superintendent of the finances, has not, I believe, the right of life and death."

"That may be," said Porthos; "but in the place of M. Fouquet —"

Aramis, fearing that Porthos was about to say something awkward, interrupted him: "Come, D'Artagnan!" said he, "this is quite enough about other people; let us talk a little about yourself."

"Of me you know all that I can tell you. On the contrary, let me hear a little about you, Aramis."

"I have told you, my friend. There is nothing of Aramis left in me."

"Nor of the Abbé d'Herblay even?"

"No, not even of him. You see a man whom God has taken by the hand, whom he has conducted to a position that he could never have dared even to hope for."

"God?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Yes."

"Well, that is strange! I have been told it was M. Fouquet."

"Who told you that?" cried Aramis, without being able, with all the power of his will, to prevent a slight flush coloring his cheeks.

"Why, Bazin, in faith!"

"The fool!"

"Indeed, I do not say he is a man of genius; but he told me so, and after him I repeat it to you."

"I have never seen M. Fouquet," replied Aramis, with a look as pure and calm as that of a virgin who has never told a lie.

"Well; but if you have seen him and even known him, there is no harm in that," replied D'Artagnan. "M. Fouquet is a very good sort of man."

"Humph!"

"A great politician."

Aramis made a gesture of indifference.

"An all-powerful minister."

"I hold only of the king and the Pope," said Aramis.

"*Dame!* listen then," said D'Artagnan, in the most natural tone imaginable. "I said that because everybody here swears by M. Fouquet. The plain is M. Fouquet's; the salt-mines I have bought are M. Fouquet's; the island in which Porthos studies topography is M. Fouquet's; the garrison is M. Fouquet's; the galleys are M. Fouquet's. I confess, then, that nothing would have surprised me in your enfeoffment, or rather in that of your diocese, to M. Fouquet. He is another master than the king, that is all; but quite as powerful as a king."

"Thank God! I am not enfeoffed to anybody; I belong to nobody, and am entirely my own," replied Aramis, who during this conversation followed with his eye every gesture of D'Artagnan, every glance of Porthos. But D'Artagnan was impassive and Porthos motionless. The thrusts aimed so skilfully were parried by an able adversary; not

one hit the mark. Nevertheless, both began to feel the fatigue of such a contest, and the announcement of supper was well received by everybody. Supper changed the course of conversation. Besides, they felt that, upon their guard as each one had been, they could neither of them boast of having the advantage. Porthos had understood nothing of it all. He had remained motionless, because Aramis had made him a sign not to stir. Supper, for him, was nothing but supper; but that was quite enough for Porthos. The supper, then, went off very well. D'Artagnan was in high spirits. Aramis exceeded himself in kind affability. Porthos ate like old Pelops. Their talk was of war, finance, the arts, and love. Aramis feigned astonishment at every word of politics D'Artagnan risked. This long series of surprises increased the mistrust of D'Artagnan, as the eternal mistrust of D'Artagnan provoked the suspicions of Aramis. At length D'Artagnan designedly let fall the name of Colbert; he had reserved that stroke for the last.

"Who is this Colbert?" asked the bishop.

"Oh, come," said D'Artagnan to himself, "that is too strong! We must be careful, *mordioux*! we must be careful."

D'Artagnan then gave Aramis all the information respecting Colbert he could desire. The supper, or rather the conversation, was prolonged till one o'clock in the morning, between D'Artagnan and Aramis. At ten o'clock precisely Porthos had fallen asleep in his chair, and snored like an organ. At midnight he woke up, and they sent him to bed. "Hum!" said he, "it seems to me that I was near falling asleep; but that was all very interesting, what you were talking about."

At one o'clock Aramis conducted D'Artagnan to the chamber destined for him, which was the best in the

episcopal palace. Two servants were placed at his command. "To-morrow, at eight o'clock," said he, taking leave of D'Artagnan, "we will take, if agreeable to you, a ride on horseback with Porthos."

"At eight o'clock!" said D'Artagnan; "so late?"

"You know that I require seven hours' sleep," said Aramis.

"That is true."

"Good-night, dear friend!" and he embraced the musketeer cordially.

D'Artagnan allowed him to depart; then, as soon as the door was closed, "Good!" said he, "at five o'clock I will be on foot."

Then, this determination being made, he went to bed, and "folded the pieces together," as people say.

CHAPTER XXV.

IN WHICH PORTHOS BEGINS TO BE SORRY FOR HAVING COME WITH D'ARTAGNAN.

Scarcely had D'Artagnan extinguished his taper, when Aramis, who had watched through his curtains the last glimmer of light in his friend's apartment, traversed the corridor on tiptoe, and went to Porthos' room. The giant, who had been in bed nearly an hour and a half, lay grandly stretched out upon the eider-down. He was in that happy calm of the first sleep, which with Porthos was proof against the noise of bells or the report of cannon; his head swam in that soft oscillation which reminds us of the soothing motion of a ship. A moment more, and Porthos would have begun to dream. The door of the chamber opened softly under the delicate pressure of the hand of Aramis. The bishop approached the sleeper. A thick carpet deadened the sound of his steps; and besides, Porthos snored in a manner to drown all noise. Aramis laid one hand on the sleeper's shoulder. "Rouse!" said he; "wake up, my dear Porthos!" The voice of Aramis was soft and kind, but it conveyed more than a notice, — it conveyed an order. His hand was light, but it indicated a danger.

Porthos heard the voice and felt the hand of Aramis, even in the profoundness of his sleep. He started up. "Who goes there?" said he, in his giant's voice.

"Hush! hush! It is I," said Aramis.

"You, my friend? And what the devil do you wake me for?"

"To tell you that you must set off directly."

"Set off?"

"Yes."

"Where for?"

"For Paris."

Porthos bounded up in his bed, and then sank back again, fixing his great eyes in terror upon Aramis.

"For Paris?"

"Yes."

"A hundred leagues?" said he.

"A hundred and four," replied the bishop.

"Oh, *mon Dieu!*" sighed Porthos, lying down again, like those children who contend with their nurse to gain an hour or two more sleep.

"Thirty hours' riding," added Aramis, firmly. "You know there are good relays."

Porthos pushed out one leg, allowing a groan to escape him.

"Come, come, my friend!" insisted the prelate, with a sort of impatience.

Porthos drew the other leg out of the bed. "And is it absolutely necessary that I should go?" said he.

"Urgently necessary."

Porthos got upon his feet, and began to shake both walls and floors with steps like the weight of a marble statue.

"Hush! hush! for the love of Heaven, my dear Porthos!" said Aramis; "you will wake somebody."

"Ah! that 's true," replied Porthos, in a voice of thunder, "I forgot that; but never fear, I will be careful;" and so saying, he let fall a belt loaded with his sword and pistols, and a purse, from which the crowns escaped with a ringing and prolonged noise. This noise made the

blood of Aramis boil, while it provoked in Porthos a formidable burst of laughter. "How droll that is!" said he, in the same voice.

"Not so loud, Porthos, not so loud!"

"True, true!" and he lowered his voice a half-note.

"I was going to say," continued Porthos, "that it is droll that we are never so slow as when we are in a hurry, and never make so much noise as when we wish to be silent."

"Yes, that is true; but let us give the proverb the lie, Porthos; let us make haste, and hold our tongues."

"You see I am doing my best," said Porthos, drawing on his trunk hose.

"Very well."

"This seems to be something urgent?"

"It is more than that; it is serious, Porthos."

"Oh!"

"D'Artagnan has questioned you, has he not?"

"Questioned me?"

"Yes, at Belle-Isle?"

"Not the least in the world."

"Are you sure of that, Porthos?"

"*Parbleu!*"

"It is impossible. Recollect yourself."

"He asked me what I was doing, and I told him, — studying topography. I would have made use of another word which you employed one day."

"Of castrametation?"

"Yes, that's it; but I never could recollect it."

"All the better. What more did he ask you?"

"Who M. Gétard was."

"Next?"

"Who M. Jupenet was."

"He did not happen to see our plan of fortifications, did he?"

"Yes."

"The devil he did!"

"But don't be alarmed; I had rubbed out your writing with India-rubber. It was impossible for him to suppose you had given me any advice in those works."

"Ay; but our friend has very keen eyes."

"What are you afraid of?"

"I fear that everything is discovered, Porthos; the necessity is, then, to prevent a great misfortune. I have given orders to my people to close all the gates and doors. D'Artagnan will not be able to get out before daybreak. Your horse is ready saddled; you will gain the first relay; by five o'clock in the morning, you will have gone fifteen leagues. Come!"

Aramis then assisted Porthos to dress, piece by piece, with as much celerity as the most skilful *valet de chambre* could have done. Porthos, half confused, half stupefied, let him do as he liked, and was lost in excuses. When he was ready, Aramis took him by the hand, and led him, making him place his foot with precaution on every step of the stairs, preventing his running against door-frames, turning him this way and that, as if Aramis had been the giant and Porthos the dwarf. Soul set fire to and animated matter. A horse was waiting, ready saddled, in the courtyard. Porthos mounted. Then Aramis himself took the horse by the bridle, and led him over some dung spread in the yard with the evident intention of suppressing noise. He at the same time pinched the horse's nose, to prevent him from neighing. When they had arrived at the outer gate, drawing Porthos towards him, who was going off without even asking him what for, "Now, Friend Porthos, now; without drawing bridle, till you get to Paris," whispered he, in his ear: "eat on horseback, drink on horseback, sleep on horseback, but lose not a minute!"

"That 's enough; I will not stop."

"This letter to M. Fouquet; cost what it may, he must have it to-morrow before midday."

"He shall have it."

"And do not forget one thing, my friend."

"What is that?"

"That you are riding after your title of duke and peer."

"Oh! oh!" said Porthos, with his eyes sparkling; "I will do it in twenty-four hours in that case."

"Try to do so."

"Then let go the bridle; and forward, Goliath!"

Aramis did let go, — not the bridle, but the horse's nose. Porthos released his hand, clapped spurs to his horse, and the maddened animal set off at a gallop. As long as he could distinguish Porthos through the darkness, Aramis followed him with his eyes; then, when he was completely out of sight, re-entered the yard. Nothing had stirred in D'Artagnan's apartment. The valet placed on watch at the door had neither seen any light nor heard any noise. Aramis closed his door carefully, sent the lackey to bed, and quickly sought his own.

D'Artagnan really suspected nothing, therefore thought he had gained everything, when he awoke in the morning about half-past four. He ran to the window in his shirt. The window looked out upon the court. Day was dawning. The court was deserted; the fowls, even, had not yet left their roosts. Not a servant appeared. All the doors were closed.

"Good! perfect quiet!" said D'Artagnan to himself. "Never mind; I am up first in the house. Let us dress; that will be so much done;" and D'Artagnan dressed himself. But this time he did not study to give to the costume of M. Agnan that plain and almost ecclesiastical

appearance he had affected before; he managed, by drawing his belt tighter, by buttoning his clothes in a different fashion, and by putting on his hat a little on one side, to restore to his person somewhat of that military character the absence of which had surprised Aramis. This being done, he made free, or rather affected to make free, with his host, and entered his chamber without ceremony.

Aramis was asleep, or feigned to be asleep. A large book lay open upon his night-desk; a wax-light was still burning above its silver tray. This was more than enough to prove to D'Artagnan the innocence of the prelate's night, and the good intentions of his waking. The musketeer did to the bishop precisely as the bishop had done to Porthos, —he tapped him on the shoulder. Evidently Aramis pretended to sleep; for instead of waking suddenly, he who slept so lightly, required a repetition of the summons.

"Ah! is that you?" said he, stretching his arms. "What an agreeable surprise! Faith! sleep had made me forget I had the happiness to possess you. What o'clock is it?"

"I do not know," said D'Artagnan, a little embarrassed. "Early, I believe. But, you know, that devil of a military habit of waking with the day sticks to me still."

"Do you wish that we should go out so soon?" asked Aramis. "It appears to me to be very early."

"Just as you like."

"I thought we had agreed not to get on horseback before eight."

"Possibly; but I had so great a wish to see you, that I said to myself, the sooner the better."

"And my seven hours' sleep?" said Aramis. "Take care! I had reckoned upon them; and what I lose of them I must make up."

"But it seems to me that formerly you were less of a sleeper than that, dear friend; your blood was alive, and you were never to be found in bed."

"And it is exactly on account of what you tell me, that I am so fond of being there now."

"Then you confess that it is not for the sake of sleeping that you have put me off till eight o'clock."

"I was afraid you would laugh at me if I told you the truth."

"Tell me, notwithstanding."

"Well, from six to eight, I am accustomed to perform my devotions."

"Your devotions?"

"Yes."

"I did not believe a bishop's exercises were so severe."

"A bishop, my friend, must sacrifice more to appearances than a simple clerk."

"*Mordioux!* Aramis, that is a word which reconciles me with your greatness. To appearances! That is a musketeer's word, in good truth! Hurrah for appearances, Aramis!"

"Instead of felicitating me upon it, pardon it me, D'Artagnan. It is a very mundane word which I have allowed to escape me."

"Must I leave you, then?"

"I want time for meditation, my friend."

"Well, I will leave you; but for the sake of that poor pagan called D'Artagnan, abridge them for once, I beg: I thirst for speech of you."

"Well, D'Artagnan, I promise you that within an hour and a half—"

"An hour and a half of devotions! Ah! my friend, be as reasonable with me as you can. Let me have the best bargain possible."

Aramis began to laugh. "Still agreeable, still young, still gay," said he. "You have come into my diocese to set me quarrelling with grace."

"Bah!"

"And you know well that I was never able to resist your seductions; you will cost me my salvation, D'Artagnan."

D'Artagnan bit his lips. "Well," said he, "I will take the sin on my own head; favor me with one simple Christian sign of the cross and hurry through with one pater, and we will set out."

"Hush!" said Aramis, "we are no longer alone; I hear strangers coming up."

"Well, dismiss them."

"Impossible; I made an appointment with them yesterday. It is the principal of the college of the Jesuits, and the superior of the Dominicans."

"Your staff? Well, so be it."

"What are you going to do?"

"I am going to wake Porthos, and wait in his company till you have finished the conference."

Aramis did not stir; his brow remained unbent; he betrayed himself by no gesture or word. "Go," said he, as D'Artagnan advanced to the door. "By the way, do you know where Porthos sleeps?"

"No, but I can inquire."

"Take the corridor, and open the second door on the left."

"Thank you; *au revoir!*" and D'Artagnan departed in the direction pointed out by Aramis.

Ten minutes had not elapsed when he came back. He found Aramis seated between the superior of the Dominicans and the principal of the college of the Jesuits, exactly in the same situation in which he had found him

formerly in the inn at Crèvecœur. This company did not at all terrify the musketeer.

"What is it?" said Aramis, quietly. "You have, apparently, something to say to me, my friend."

"It is," replied D'Artagnan, fixing his eyes upon Aramis, — "it is that Porthos is not in his apartment."

"Indeed!" said Aramis, calmly; "are you sure?"

"*Pardieu!* I came from his chamber."

"Where can he be, then?"

"That is what I ask you."

"And have you not inquired?"

"Yes, I have."

"And what answer did you get?"

"That Porthos, often going out of a morning without saying anything to anybody, had probably gone out."

"What did you do then?"

"I went to the stables," replied D'Artagnan, carelessly.

"What for?"

"To see if Porthos had gone out on horseback."

"And had he?" interrogated the bishop.

"Well, there is a horse missing, — stall No. 5, Goliath."

All this dialogue, it may be easily understood, was not free from a certain affectation on the part of the musketeer, and a perfect complaisance on the part of Aramis.

"Oh! I see how it is," said Aramis, after having considered for a moment; "Porthos has gone out to give us a surprise."

"A surprise?"

"Yes. The canal which leads from Vannes to the sea abounds in teal and snipes; that is Porthos' favorite sport, and he will bring us back a dozen for our breakfast."

"Do you think so?" said D'Artagnan.

"I am sure of it. Where else can he have gone? I would lay a wager that he took a gun with him."

"That is possible," said D'Artagnan.

"Do one thing, my friend: get on horseback, and join him."

"You are right," said D'Artagnan; "I will."

"Do you wish me to accompany you?"

"No, thank you. Porthos is easily recognizable; I will inquire as I go along."

"Will you take an arquebuse?"

"Thank you."

"Order what horse you like to be saddled."

"The one I rode yesterday, on coming from Belle-Isle."

"So be it; use my establishment as your own."

Aramis rang, and gave orders to have the horse M. d'Artagnan had chosen saddled.

D'Artagnan followed the servant charged with the execution of this order. When about to pass through the door, the servant stepped aside to allow M. d'Artagnan to pass; and at that moment he caught the eye of his master. A contraction of the brow gave the intelligent spy to understand that all should be given to D'Artagnan that he wished. D'Artagnan got into the saddle, and Aramis heard the clatter of the hoofs on the pavement. An instant after, the servant returned.

"Well?" demanded the bishop.

"Monseigneur, he has followed the course of the canal, and is going towards the sea," said the servant.

"Very well!" said Aramis.

In fact, D'Artagnan, dismissing all suspicion, hastened towards the ocean, constantly hoping to see on the moors or on the beach the colossal form of his friend Porthos. He persisted in fancying that he could trace a horse's step in every puddle. Sometimes he imagined that he heard the report of a gun. This illusion lasted three

hours: during two of them he went forward in search of his friend; in the last he returned to the house.

"We must have passed each other," said he, "and I shall find the two good fellows waiting for me at table."

D'Artagnan was mistaken; he no more found Porthos at the palace than he had found him on the banks of the canal. Aramis was waiting for him at the top of the stairs, looking very much concerned.

"Did my people not find you, my dear D'Artagnan?" cried he, as soon as he caught sight of the musketeer.

"No; did you send any one after me?"

"I am deeply concerned, my friend, deeply, to have induced you to make such a useless search; but about seven o'clock the almoner of St. Paterne came here. He had met Du Vallon, who was going away, and who, being unwilling to disturb anybody at the palace, had charged him to tell me that, fearing M. Gétard would play him some ill turn in his absence, he was going to take advantage of the morning tide to cross over to Belle-Isle."

"But, tell me, Goliath has not crossed the four leagues of sea, surely?"

"There are full six," said Aramis.

"That makes it less probable still."

"Therefore, my friend," said Aramis, with one of his blandest smiles, "Goliath is in the stable, well pleased, I will answer for it, that Porthos is no longer on his back."

In fact, the horse had been brought back from the relay by the direction of the prelate, whom no detail escaped. D'Artagnan appeared as well satisfied as possible with the explanation. He entered upon a rôle of dissimulation which agreed perfectly with the suspicions that arose more and more strongly in his mind. He breakfasted between the Jesuit and Aramis, having the

Dominican in front of him, and smiling particularly at the Dominican, whose jolly fat face pleased him much. The repast was long and sumptuous: excellent Spanish wine, fine Morbihan oysters, exquisite fish from the mouth of the Loire, enormous prawns from Paimbœuf, and delicious game from the moors constituted the principal part of it. D'Artagnan ate much, and drank but little. Aramis drank nothing, unless it was water. After breakfast, —

"You offered me an arquebuse," said D'Artagnan.

"I did."

"Lend it to me, then."

"Are you going shooting?"

"While waiting for Porthos, it is the best thing I can do, I think."

"Take which you like from the rack."

"Will you not come with me?"

"I would with great pleasure; but, alas! my friend, sporting is forbidden to bishops."

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan, "I did not know that."

"Besides," continued Aramis, "I shall be busy till midday."

"I shall go alone, then?" said D'Artagnan.

"I am sorry to say you must; but be sure to come back to dinner."

"*Pardieu!* the eating at your house is too good to make me think of not coming back."

Thereupon D'Artagnan took leave of his host, bowed to the guests, and took his arquebuse, but, instead of shooting, went straight to the little port of Vannes. He looked back to see if anybody was following him, but saw no one. He chartered a little fishing-boat for twenty-five livres, and set off at half-past eleven, convinced that he had not been followed; and that was true. He had

not been followed; but a Jesuit brother, stationed in the top of the steeple of his church and aided by an excellent glass, had not, since the morning, lost sight of one of his steps. At a quarter to twelve Aramis was informed that D'Artagnan was sailing towards Belle-Isle.

The voyage was rapid; a good north-northeast wind drove him towards the isle. As he gradually approached, his eyes were searching the coast. He looked to see if, upon the shore or upon the fortifications, the brilliant dress and vast stature of Porthos might be standing out against the slightly clouded sky. But his search was in vain; he landed without having seen anything, and learned from the first soldier interrogated by him that M. du Vallon had not yet returned from Vannes. Then, without losing an instant, D'Artagnan ordered his little boat to put its head towards Sarzeau. We know that the wind changes with the different hours of the day: it had gone round from north-northeast to southeast; the wind, then, was almost as good for the return to Sarzeau as it had been for the voyage to Belle-Isle. In three hours D'Artagnan had reached the Continent; two hours more sufficed for his ride to Vannes. In spite of the rapidity of his passage, what D'Artagnan endured of impatience and anger during that passage, only the deck of the vessel upon which he stamped backward and forward for three hours could relate to history. He made but one bound from the quay whereon he landed to the episcopal palace. He thought to terrify Aramis by the suddenness of his return; he wished to reproach him with his duplicity, — with reserve, but with sufficient spirit, nevertheless, to make him feel all the consequences of it, and force from him a part of his secret. He hoped, in short, — thanks to that force of expression which is to mysteries

what the charge with the bayonet is to redoubts, — to bring the mysterious Aramis to some manifestation or other. But he found in the vestibule of the palace the *valet de chambre*, who closed the passage, while smiling upon him with a sanctimonious air.

"Monseigneur?" cried D'Artagnan, endeavoring to put him aside with his hand. Staggered for an instant, the valet resumed his perpendicular.

"Monseigneur?" said he.

"Yes, to be sure; do you not know me, idiot?"

"Yes; you are the Chevalier d'Artagnan."

"Then let me pass."

"It is of no use."

"Why of no use?"

"Because his Greatness is not at home."

"What! his Greatness is not at home? where is he, then?"

"Gone."

"Gone?"

"Yes."

"Whither?"

"I don't know; but perhaps he tells Monsieur the Chevalier."

"And how? where? in what way?"

"In this letter which he gave me for Monsieur the Chevalier;" and the *valet de chambre* drew a letter from his pocket.

"Give it to me, then, you rascal!" said D'Artagnan, snatching it from his hand. "Oh, yes," continued he, at the first line, "yes, I understand;" and he read: —

DEAR FRIEND, — An affair of the most urgent nature calls me to a distant parish of my diocese. I hoped to see you again before I set out; but I lose that hope on thinking that you are going, no doubt, to remain two or three days at Belle-Isle,

with our dear Porthos. Amuse yourself as well as you can; but do not attempt to hold out against him at table. This is a counsel I might have given even to Athos, in his most brilliant and best days. Adieu, dear friend; believe that I regret greatly not having better and for a longer time profited by your excellent company.

"*Mordioux!*" cried D'Artagnan, "I am tricked. Ah! blockhead, brute, triple fool that I am! But let them laugh best who laugh last. Oh, duped, duped, like a monkey cheated with an empty nutshell!" and with a hearty blow bestowed upon the nose of the still grinning *valet de chambre*, he made all haste out of the episcopal palace. Furet, however good a trotter, was not equal to present circumstances. D'Artagnan therefore took the post, and chose a horse, which he made to understand, with good spurs and a light hand, that stags are not the most agile coursers in creation.

CHAPTER XXVI.

IN WHICH D'ARTAGNAN MAKES ALL SPEED, PORTHOS SNORES, AND ARAMIS COUNSELS.

From thirty to thirty-five hours after the events we have just related, as M. Fouquet, according to his custom, having forbidden interruption, was working in the cabinet of his house at St. Mandé, with which we are already acquainted, a carriage drawn by four horses streaming with sweat entered the court at full gallop. This carriage was probably expected; for three or four lackeys hastened to the door, which they opened. While M. Fouquet rose from his desk and ran to the window, a man got painfully out of the carriage, descending with difficulty the three steps, leaning upon the shoulders of the lackeys. He had scarcely uttered his name, when the lackey upon whom he was not leaning sprang up the steps and disappeared in the vestibule. This man went to inform his master; but he had no occasion to knock at the door, Fouquet was standing on the threshold.

"Monseigneur, the Bishop of Vannes," said he.

"Very well," replied his master.

Then, leaning over the baluster of the staircase, of which Aramis was beginning to ascend the first steps, "You, dear friend!" said he, "you, so soon!"

"Yes; I myself, Monsieur! but bruised, battered, as you see."

"Oh, my poor, dear friend!" said Fouquet, presenting him his arm, upon which Aramis leaned, while the servants drew back with respect.

"Bah!" replied Aramis, "it is nothing, since I am here. The principal thing was that I should get here, and here I am."

"Speak quickly," said Fouquet, closing the door of his cabinet behind Aramis and himself.

"Are we alone?"

"Yes, perfectly."

"No one can listen to us; no one can hear us?"

"Have no fear; nobody."

"Has M. du Vallon arrived?"

"Yes."

"And you have received my letter?"

"Yes. The affair is serious, apparently, since it necessitates your presence in Paris at a moment when your presence was so needed out there."

"You are right; it cannot be more serious."

"Thank you! thank you! What is it about? But, for God's sake! before anything else, take time to breathe, dear friend! You are so pale, you frighten me."

"I am really in great pain. But, for Heaven's sake, think nothing about me. Did M. du Vallon tell you nothing, when he delivered the letter to you?"

"No. I heard a great noise; I went to the window; I saw at the foot of the steps as it were a horseman of marble; I went down, he held the letter out to me, and his horse fell down dead."

"But he?"

"He fell with the horse; he was lifted up, and carried to an apartment. Having read the letter, I went up to him, in hopes of obtaining more ample information; but he was asleep, and after such a fashion that it was impossible to wake him. I took pity on him, and gave orders that his boots should be taken off, and that he should be left quite undisturbed."

"Very good; now, this is the question in hand, Monseigneur. You have seen M. d'Artagnan in Paris, have you not?"

"Certainly, and think him a man of intelligence, and even a man of heart, although he did bring about the death of our dear friends Lyodot and D'Eymeris."

"Alas! yes, I heard of that. At Tours I met the courier who was bringing me the letter from Gourville and the despatches from Pellisson. Have you seriously considered that event, Monsieur?"

"Yes."

"And in it you perceived a direct attack upon your sovereignty?"

"Do you believe it to be so?"

"Oh, yes, I think so."

"Well, I must confess that gloomy idea occurred to me also."

"Do not blind yourself, Monsieur, in the name of Heaven! Listen attentively to me. I return to D'Artagnan."

"I am all attention."

"Under what circumstances did you see him?"

"He came here for money."

"With what kind of order?"

"With an order from the king."

"Direct?"

"Signed by his Majesty."

"There, then! Well, D'Artagnan has been to Belle-Isle; he was disguised; he passed for some sort of a steward, charged by his master to purchase salt-mines. Now, D'Artagnan has no other master than the king; he came, then, sent by the king. He saw Porthos."

"Who is Porthos?"

"I beg your pardon, I made a mistake. He saw M. du

Vallon at Belle-Isle; and he knows, as well as you and I do, that Belle-Isle is fortified."

"And you think that the king sent him there?" said Fouquet, thoughtfully.

"I certainly do."

"And D'Artagnan, in the hands of the king, is a dangerous instrument?"

"The most dangerous imaginable."

"Then I formed a correct opinion of him at the first glance."

"How so?"

"I wished to attach him to myself."

"If you judged him to be the bravest, the most acute, and the most adroit man in France, you have judged correctly."

"He must be ours, then, at any price."

"D'Artagnan?"

"Is not that your opinion?"

"It may be my opinion, but you will never have him."

"Why?"

"Because we have allowed the time to go by. He was dissatisfied with the court; we should have profited by that. Since that, he has been over to England; there he powerfully assisted in the restoration, and gained a fortune; since then he has returned to the service of the king. Well, the reason of his return to the service of the king is that he has been well paid for the service."

"We will pay him still better, that is all."

"Oh, Monsieur, excuse me; D'Artagnan has a high sense of his word, and where that word is once engaged, it remains inviolable."

"What do you conclude, then?" said Fouquet, with great uneasiness.

"That, for the present, the principal thing is to parry a dangerous blow.'

"And how is it to be parried?"

"Listen. D'Artagnan will come and render an account to the king of his mission."

"Oh, we have time enough to think about that."

"How so?"

"You have a good start of him, I presume?"

"Nearly ten hours."

"Well, in ten hours —"

Aramis shook his weary head. "Look at those clouds which flit across the sky, at those swallows which cut the air. D'Artagnan moves more quickly than the cloud or the bird; D'Artagnan is the wind which carries them."

"Nonsense!"

"I tell you that man is something superhuman, Monsieur. He is of my age, and I have known him these five-and-thirty years."

"Well?"

"Well, listen to my calculation, Monsieur. I sent M. du Vallon off to you at two hours after midnight. M. du Vallon was eight hours in advance of me; when did M. du Vallon arrive?"

"About four hours ago."

"You see, then, that I gained four upon him; and yet Porthos is a stanch horseman, and has left on the road eight dead horses, whose bodies I passed one after another. I rode post fifty leagues. But I have the gout, the gravel, and what else I know not; so that fatigue kills me. I was obliged to dismount at Tours; since that, rolling along in a carriage, half dead, sometimes overturned, often drawn upon the sides and sometimes on the back of the carriage, always with four spirited horses at full gallop, I have arrived, — arrived, gaining

four hours upon Porthos. But, look you, D'Artagnan does not weigh three hundredweight, as Porthos does; D'Artagnan has not the gout and the gravel, as I have; he is not a horseman, he is a centaur. D'Artagnan, look you, set out for Belle-Isle when I set out for Paris; and D'Artagnan, notwithstanding the ten hours' start that I have, will arrive within two hours after me."

"But, then, accidents?"

"He never meets with any accidents."

"Horses may fail him."

"He will run as fast as a horse."

"Good God! what a man!"

"Yes, he is a man whom I love and admire. I love him because he is good, great, and loyal; I admire him because he represents to me the culminating point of human powers: but while loving and admiring him, I fear him, and am on my guard against him. Now, then, I resume, Monsieur. In two hours D'Artagnan will be here: be beforehand with him. Go to the Louvre, and see the king before he sees D'Artagnan."

"What shall I say to the king?"

"Nothing; give him Belle-Isle."

"Oh, M. d'Herblay! M. d'Herblay!" cried Fouquet, "what projects are crushed all at once!"

"After one project has failed, there is always another which may lead to good; we should never despair. Go, Monsieur, and go quickly."

"But that garrison, so carefully chosen, the king will change it directly."

"That garrison, Monsieur, was the king's when it entered Belle-Isle; it is yours to-day. It will be the same with all garrisons after a fortnight's occupation. Let things go on, Monsieur. Do you see any inconvenience in having an army at the end of a year, instead of

one or two regiments? Do you not see that your garrison of to-day will make you partisans at La Rochelle, Nantes, Bordeaux, Toulouse, — everywhere they may be placed? Go to the king, Monsieur; go! Time flies; and D'Artagnan, while we are losing our time, is flying like an arrow along the highroad."

"M. d'Herblay, you know that each word from you is a germ which fructifies in my thoughts. I will go to the Louvre."

"Instantly, will you not?"

"I ask time only to change my dress."

"Remember that D'Artagnan has no need to pass through St. Mandé, but will go straight to the Louvre; that is cutting off an hour from the advance which remains to us."

"D'Artagnan may have everything except my English horses. I shall be at the Louvre in twenty-five minutes;" and without losing a second, Fouquet gave orders for his departure.

Aramis had only time to say to him, "Return as quickly as you go; for I shall await you impatiently."

Five minutes after, the superintendent was flying along the road to Paris. During this time Aramis desired to be shown the chamber in which Porthos was sleeping. At the door of Fouquet's cabinet he was folded in the arms of Pellisson, who had just heard of his arrival, and had left his office to see him. Aramis received, with that friendly dignity which he knew so well how to assume, Pellisson's caresses, which were as respectful as they were earnest; but, all at once, stopping on the landing-place, "What is that I hear up yonder?" he demanded.

There was, in fact, a hoarse, growling kind of noise, like the roar of a hungry tiger or an impatient lion.

"Oh, that is nothing," said Pellisson, smiling.

"Well; but —"

"It is M. du Vallon snoring."

"Of course," said Aramis; "no one but he is capable of making such a noise. Allow me, Pellisson, to inquire if he is in need of anything."

"And you will permit me to accompany you?"

"Oh, certainly!" and both entered the chamber. Porthos was stretched upon a bed, his face violet rather than red, his eyes swelled, his mouth wide open. The roaring which escaped from the deep cavities of his chest made the panes of the windows vibrate. To those intense and clearly defined muscles starting from his face, to his hair matted with sweat, to the violent heaving of his chin and shoulders, it was impossible to refuse a certain degree of admiration. Strength carried to that point is almost divinity. The herculean legs and feet of Porthos had, by swelling, burst his leather boots; all the strength of his huge body was converted into the rigidity of stone. Porthos moved no more than does the giant of granite which reclines upon the plains of Agrigentum. According to Pellisson's orders, his boots had been cut off, for no human power could have pulled them off. Four lackeys had tried in vain, pulling at them as if they were capstans; and yet all this did not awaken him. They had taken off his boots in fragments, and his legs had fallen back upon the bed. They had then cut off the rest of his clothes, and carried him to a bath, in which they let him lie a considerable time. They had put on him clean linen, and placed him in a well-warmed bed, — all this with an amount of exertion and movement which might have roused a dead man, but which did not make Porthos open an eye, or interrupt for a second his formidable snoring. Aramis on his part, with his hard

and nervous nature, armed with extraordinary courage, tried to outbrave fatigue, and employ himself with Gourville and Pellisson, but he fainted in the chair in which he had persisted in remaining. They took him up and carried him into an adjoining room, where repose upon a bed soon calmed his throbbing brain.

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN WHICH M. FOUQUET ACTS.

In the mean time Fouquet was hastening to the Louvre, at the best speed of his English horses.

The king was employed with Colbert. All at once the king became thoughtful. The two sentences of death he had signed on mounting his throne sometimes recurred to his memory; they were two black spots which he saw with his eyes open, two spots of blood which he saw when his eyes were closed. "Monsieur," said he, all at once, to the intendant, "it sometimes seems to me that those two men you made me condemn were not very great culprits."

"Sire, they were picked out from the herd of the farmers of the revenue, which wanted decimating."

"Picked out by whom?"

"By necessity, Sire," replied Colbert, coldly.

"Necessity! a great word!" murmured the young king.

"A great goddess, Sire."

"They were devoted friends of the superintendent, were they not?"

"Yes, Sire; friends who would have given their lives for M. Fouquet."

"They have given them, Monsieur," said the king.

"That is true; but uselessly, by good luck, — which was not their intention."

"How much money had these men fraudulently obtained?"

"Ten millions, perhaps; of which six have been confiscated from their property."

"And is that money in my coffers?" said the king, with a certain air of repugnance.

"It is there, Sire; but this confiscation, while threatening M. Fouquet, has not touched him."

"You conclude, then, M. Colbert —"

"That if M. Fouquet has raised against your Majesty a troop of factious rioters to extricate his friends from punishment, he will raise an army when he shall have to extricate himself from punishment."

The king darted at his confidant one of those looks which resemble the ominous glare of a flash of lightning, one of those looks which illuminate the darkness of the deepest consciences. "I am astonished," said he, "that, thinking such things of M. Fouquet, you did not come to give me your counsels thereupon."

"Counsels upon what, Sire?"

"Tell me, in the first place, clearly and precisely, what you think, M. Colbert."

"Upon what subject, Sire?"

"Upon the conduct of M. Fouquet."

"I think, Sire, that M. Fouquet, not satisfied with attracting all the money to himself, as M. de Mazarin did, and by that means depriving your Majesty of a part of your power, still wishes to attract to himself all the friends of easy life and pleasures, — of what idlers call poetry, and politicians corruption. I think that, by holding the subjects of your Majesty in pay, he trespasses upon the royal prerogative, and cannot, if this continues so, be long in relegating your Majesty among the weak and obscure."

"How would you designate all these projects, M. Colbert?"

"The projects of M. Fouquet, Sire?"

"Yes."

"They are called crimes of high treason."

"And what is done to criminals guilty of high treason?"

"They are arrested, tried, and punished."

"You are quite sure that M. Fouquet has conceived the idea of the crime you impute to him?"

"I can say more, Sire; there is even a beginning of the execution of it."

"Well, then, I return to that which I was saying, M. Colbert."

"And you were saying, Sire —"

"Give me counsel."

"Pardon me, Sire; but, in the first place, I have something to add."

"Speak."

"An evident, palpable, material proof of treason."

"And what is that?"

"I have just learned that M. Fouquet is fortifying Belle Isle-en-Mer."

"Ah, indeed!"

"Yes, Sire."

"Are you sure?"

"Perfectly. Do you know, Sire, what soldiers there are at Belle-Isle?"

"No, upon my word. Do you?"

"I am ignorant likewise, Sire; I should therefore propose to your Majesty to send somebody to Belle-Isle."

"Who?"

"Me, for instance."

"And what would you do at Belle-Isle?"

"Inform myself whether it is true that, after the example of the ancient feudal lords, M. Fouquet is fortifying his walls."

"And with what purpose would he do that?"

"With the purpose of defending himself some day against his king."

"But if it be thus, M. Colbert," said Louis, "we must immediately do as you say; M. Fouquet must be arrested."

"That is impossible."

"I thought I had already told you, Monsieur, that I suppressed that word in my service."

"The service of your Majesty cannot prevent M. Fouquet from being superintendent-general."

"Well?"

"And in consequence of holding that post, he has for him all the parliament, as he has all the army by his largesses, all literature by his favors, and all the nobility by his presents."

"That is to say, then, that I can do nothing against M. Fouquet?"

"Absolutely nothing, — at least at present, Sire."

"You are an unfruitful counsellor, M. Colbert."

"Oh, no, Sire, for I will not confine myself to pointing out the peril to your Majesty."

"Come, then, where shall we begin to undermine the Colossus? Let us see;" and his Majesty began to laugh with bitterness.

"He has grown great by money; kill him by money, Sire."

"If I were to deprive him of his charge?"

"A bad means, Sire."

"The good — the good, then?"

"Ruin him, Sire, I tell you."

"But how?"

"Occasions will not be wanting; take advantage of all occasions."

"Point them out to me."

"Here is one, first of all. His royal Highness Monsieur is about to be married; his nuptials must be magnificent. That is a good occasion for your Majesty to demand a million of M. Fouquet. M. Fouquet, who pays twenty thousand livres down when he need not pay more than five thousand, will easily find that million when your Majesty shall demand it."

"That is all very well; I will demand it," said Louis.

"If your Majesty will sign the order, I will have the money drawn myself;" and Colbert pushed a paper before the king, and handed him a pen.

At that moment the usher opened the door and announced Monsieur the Superintendent. Louis turned pale. Colbert let the pen fall, and drew back from the king, over whom he extended his black wings like a bad angel. The superintendent made his entrance like a true courtier, to whom a single glance was sufficient to make him appreciate a situation. This situation was not very encouraging for Fouquet, whatever might be the consciousness of his strength. The small black eye of Colbert dilated with envy, and the clear eye of Louis XIV. inflamed with anger indicated a pressing danger. Courtiers are, with regard to court rumors, like old soldiers, who distinguish through blasts of wind and the moaning of boughs the sound of the distant tread of an armed troop. They can, after having listened, tell pretty nearly how many men are marching, how many arms resound, how many cannon roll. Fouquet had then only to interrogate the silence which his arrival had produced; he found it big with menacing revelations.

The king allowed him time enough to advance as far as the middle of the chamber. His adolescent modesty constrained him to this momentary forbearance. Fouquet boldly seized the opportunity.

"Sire," said he, "I was impatient to see your Majesty."

"What for?" demanded Louis.

"To announce some good news to you."

Colbert, with a less imposing presence and less geniality of spirit, resembled Fouquet in many points. He had the same penetration, the same knowledge of men; he had, moreover, that great power of self-restraint which gives to hypocrites time to reflect and gather themselves up to take a spring. He guessed that Fouquet was going to meet the blow he was about to deal him. His eyes sparkled.

"What news?" asked the king. Fouquet placed a roll of papers on the table.

"Let your Majesty have the goodness to cast your eyes over this work," said he.

The king slowly unfolded the roll. "Plans?" said he.

"Yes, Sire."

"And what are these plans?"

"A new fortification, Sire."

"Ah!" said the king, "you occupy yourself with tactics and strategy, then, M. Fouquet?"

"I occupy myself with everything that may be useful to the reign of your Majesty," replied Fouquet.

"Beautiful drawings!" said the king, looking at the design.

"Your Majesty comprehends, without doubt," said Fouquet, bending over the paper; "here is the circle of the walls, here are the forts, there the advanced works."

"And what do I see here, Monsieur?"

"The sea."

"The sea all round?"

"Yes, Sire."

"And what is this place of which you show me the plan?"

"Sire, it is Belle-Isle-en-Mer," replied Fouquet, with simplicity.

At this word, at this name, Colbert made so marked a movement that the king turned round to enforce the necessity of reserve. Fouquet did not appear to be the least in the world concerned by the movement of Colbert, nor the king's signal.

"Monsieur," continued Louis, "you have, then, fortified Belle-Isle?"

"Yes, Sire; and I have brought the plan and the accounts to your Majesty," replied Fouquet. "I have expended sixteen hundred thousand livres in this operation."

"For what purpose?" replied Louis, coldly, having taken the initiative from a malicious look of the intendant.

"For an aim very easy to comprehend," replied Fouquet. "Your Majesty was not on good terms with Great Britain."

"Yes; but since the restoration of King Charles II., I have formed an alliance with him."

"That has taken place within a month's time, your Majesty; but it is more than six months since the fortifications of Belle-Isle were begun."

"Then they have become useless."

"Sire, fortifications are never useless. I fortified Belle-Isle against Messieurs Monk and Lambert, and all those London citizens who were playing at soldiers. Belle-Isle will be ready fortified against the Dutch, against whom either England or your Majesty cannot fail to make war."

The king was again silent, and looked askance at Colbert. "Belle-Isle, I believe," added Louis, "belongs to you, M. Fouquet?"

"No, Sire."

"To whom, then?"

"To your Majesty."

Colbert was seized with as much terror as if a gulf had opened beneath his feet. Louis started with admiration, either at the genius or at the devotion of Fouquet.

"Explain yourself, Monsieur," said he.

"Nothing more easy, Sire. Belle-Isle is one of my estates; I have fortified it at my own expense. But as nothing in the world can oppose a subject making an humble present to his king, I offer your Majesty the proprietorship of the estate, of which you will leave me the usufruct. Belle-Isle, as a place of war, ought to be occupied by the king. Your Majesty will be able, henceforth, to keep a safe garrison there."

Colbert almost sank down upon the floor. To keep himself from falling, he was obliged to hold by the columns of the wainscoting.

"This is a piece of great skill in the art of war that you have exhibited here, Monsieur," said Louis.

"Sire, the initiative did not come from me," replied Fouquet; "many officers have suggested it to me. The plans themselves have been made by one of the most distinguished engineers."

"His name?"

"M. du Vallon."

"M. du Vallon?" resumed Louis. "I do not know him. It is much to be lamented, M. Colbert," continued he, "that I do not know the names of the men of talent who do honor to my reign." While saying these words he turned towards Colbert. The latter felt himself crushed. The sweat flowed from his brow; not a single word presented itself to his lips; he was in unutterable tortures. "You will recollect that name," added Louis.

Colbert bowed, but was paler than his ruffles of Flemish lace.

Fouquet continued: "The masonries are of Roman mastic; the architects have composed it for me after the best examples of antiquity."

"And the cannon?" asked Louis.

"Oh, Sire, that concerns your Majesty; it did not become me to place cannon in my own house, until your Majesty had told me it was yours."

Louis began to waver, undetermined between the hatred which this so powerful man inspired him with, and the pity he felt for that other man, so cast down, who seemed to him the counterfeit of the former. But the consciousness of his kingly duty prevailed over the feelings of the man, and he stretched out his finger to the paper.

"It must have cost you a great deal of money to carry these plans into execution," said he.

"I believe I had the honor of telling your Majesty the amount?"

"Repeat it, if you please; I have forgotten it."

"Sixteen hundred thousand livres."

"Sixteen hundred thousand livres? You are enormously rich, Monsieur."

"It is your Majesty who is rich, since Belle-Isle is yours."

"Yes, thank you; but however rich I may be, M. Fouquet —" The king stopped.

"Well, Sire?" asked the superintendent.

"I foresee the moment when I shall want money."

"You, Sire? And at what moment, then?"

"To-morrow, for example."

"Will your Majesty do me the honor to explain yourself?"

"My brother is going to marry the Princess of England."

"Well, Sire?"

"Well, I ought to give the young princess a reception worthy of the granddaughter of Henry IV."

"That is but just, Sire."

"Then I shall want money."

"No doubt."

"I shall want —" Louis hesitated. The sum that he was going to demand was the same that he had been obliged to refuse Charles II. He turned towards Colbert, that he might give the blow.

"I shall want, to-morrow —" repeated he, looking at Colbert.

"A million," said the latter, bluntly, delighted to take his revenge.

Fouquet turned his back on the intendant to listen to the king. He did not turn round at all, but waited till the king repeated, or rather murmured, "A million."

"Oh, Sire," replied Fouquet, disdainfully, "a million! What will your Majesty do with a million?"

"It appears to me, nevertheless —" said Louis.

"That is not more than is spent at the nuptials of one of the most petty princes of Germany."

"Monsieur!"

"Your Majesty must have two millions at least. The horses alone will run away with five hundred thousand livres. I shall have the honor of sending your Majesty sixteen hundred thousand livres this evening."

"How!" said the king, "sixteen hundred thousand livres?"

"Look, Sire," replied Fouquet, without even turning towards Colbert, "I know that that wants four hundred thousand livres of the two millions. But this Monsieur who is intendant," pointing over his shoulder to Colbert behind him, who if possible became still paler, "has in his coffers nine hundred thousand livres of mine."

The king turned round to look at Colbert.

"But —" said the latter.

"Monsieur," continued Fouquet, still speaking indirectly to Colbert, — "Monsieur received, a week ago, sixteen hundred thousand livres; he has paid a hundred thousand livres to the Guards, seventy-five thousand livres to the hospitals, twenty-five thousand to the Swiss, a hundred and thirty thousand for stores, a thousand for arms, ten thousand for incidental expenses. I do not err, then, in reckoning upon nine hundred thousand livres that are left." Then half turning towards Colbert, like a disdainful head of office towards his inferior, "Take care, Monsieur," said he, "that those nine hundred thousand livres be remitted to his Majesty this evening, in gold."

"But," said the king, "that will make two million five hundred thousand livres."

"Sire, the five hundred thousand livres over may serve as pocket-money for his royal Highness. You understand, M. Colbert, this evening, before eight o'clock."

With these words, bowing respectfully to the king, the superintendent made his exit backward, without honoring with a single look the envious man whose head he had just half shaved.

Colbert tore his Flemish point to pieces in his rage, and bit his lips till they bled.

Fouquet had not passed the door of the cabinet, when an usher, passing by him, called out, "A courier from Bretagne for his Majesty."

"M. d'Herblay was right," murmured Fouquet, pulling out his watch; "an hour and fifty-five minutes. It was time!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN WHICH D'ARTAGNAN AT LAST PLACES HIS HAND UPON HIS CAPTAIN'S COMMISSION.

THE reader guesses beforehand whom the usher named in announcing the messenger from Bretagne. This messenger was easily recognized. It was D'Artagnan, — his clothes dusty, his face inflamed, his hair dripping with sweat, his legs stiff; he lifted his feet painfully the height of each step, upon which resounded the ring of his bloody spurs. He perceived, in the doorway through which he was passing, the superintendent coming out. Fouquet bowed with a smile to him who an hour before was bringing him ruin and death. D'Artagnan found, in his goodness of heart and in his inexhaustible vigor of body, enough presence of mind to remember the kind reception this man had given him, and bowed also, much more, however, from benevolence and compassion than from respect. He felt upon his lips the word which had so many times been repeated to the Duc de Guise: "Fly!" But to pronounce that word would have been to betray his cause; to speak that word in the cabinet of the king and before an usher, would have been to ruin himself gratuitously without saving anybody. D'Artagnan, then, contented himself with bowing to Fouquet, and entered.

At this moment the king was fluctuating between the joy the last words of Fouquet had given him, and his pleasure at the return of D'Artagnan. Without being a courtier, D'Artagnan had a glance as sure and rapid as

if he had been one. He read, on his entrance, heart-consuming humiliation on the countenance of Colbert. He even heard the king say these words to him: "Ah, M. Colbert, you have, then, nine hundred thousand livres belonging to the superintendent?" Colbert, choking, bowed, but made no reply. All this scene entered into the mind of D'Artagnan through his eyes and ears at once.

The first word of Louis XIV. to his musketeer, as if he wished it to be in contrast with what he had just been saying, was a kind "Good-day;" his second word was to send away Colbert.

The latter left the king's cabinet livid and tottering, while D'Artagnan twisted up the ends of his mustache.

"I love to see one of my servants in this disorder," said the king, admiring the martial stains upon the clothes of his envoy.

"I thought, Sire, my presence at the Louvre was sufficiently urgent to excuse my coming thus before you."

"You bring me great news, then, Monsieur?" asked the king, smiling.

"Sire, the thing is this, in two words: Belle-Isle is fortified, admirably fortified. Belle-Isle has a double *enceinte*, a citadel, two detached forts; its port contains three corsairs, and the side batteries only wait for their cannon."

"I know all that, Monsieur," replied the king.

"What! your Majesty knows all that?" replied the musketeer, stupefied.

"I have the plan of the fortifications of Belle-Isle," said the king.

"Your Majesty has the plan?"

"Here it is."

"It is really it, Sire; and I saw a similar one on the

spot." The brow of D'Artagnan became clouded. "Ah! I understand all. Your Majesty has not trusted to me alone, but has sent some other person," said he, in a reproachful tone.

"Of what importance is the manner, Monsieur, in which I have learned what I know, so that I know it?"

"Be it so, Sire," replied the musketeer, without seeking even to conceal his dissatisfaction; "but I must be permitted to say to your Majesty that it is not worth while to make me use such speed, to risk twenty times breaking my neck, if you are to salute me with such intelligence on my arrival. Sire, when people are not trusted or are deemed insufficient, they should not be employed;" and D'Artagnan, with a movement quite military, stamped with his foot, and left upon the floor dust stained with blood.

The king looked at him, inwardly enjoying his first triumph. "Monsieur," said he, at the expiration of a minute, "not only is Belle-Isle known to me, but, still further, Belle-Isle belongs to me."

"That is well, that is well, Sire! I ask no more," replied D'Artagnan. "My discharge!"

"What! your discharge?"

"Certainly! I am too proud to eat the bread of the king without gaining it, or rather by gaining it badly. My discharge, Sire!"

"Oh, oh!"

"My discharge, or I shall take it."

"You are angry, Monsieur?"

"I have reason, *mordioux!* I am thirty-two hours in the saddle, I ride night and day, I perform prodigies of speed, I arrive stiff as the corpse of a man who has been hanged; and another arrives before me! Come, Sire, I am a fool! My discharge, Sire!"

"M. d'Artagnan," said Louis, resting his white hand upon the dusty arm of the musketeer, "what I have just told you will not at all affect what I promised you. A promise given must be fulfilled;" and the young king, going straight to his table, opened a drawer and took out a folded paper. "Here is your commission of captain of Musketeers; you have won it, M. d'Artagnan."

D'Artagnan opened the paper eagerly, and looked at it twice. He could scarcely believe his eyes.

"And this commission is given you," continued the king, "not only on account of your journey to Belle-Isle, but also for your brave intervention at the Place de Grève. There, likewise, you served me valiantly."

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan, his self-command being unable to prevent a certain redness mounting up to his eyes, "you know that also, Sire?"

"Yes, I know it."

The king possessed a piercing glance and an infallible judgment, when it was his object to read a conscience. "You have something to say," said he to the musketeer, "something to say which you do not say. Come, speak freely, Monsieur; you know that I told you, once for all, that you are to be quite frank with me."

"Well, Sire! what I have to say is this, that I would prefer being made captain of Musketeers for having charged a battery at the head of my company or taken a city, than for causing two wretches to be hanged."

"Is this quite true that you tell me?"

"And why should your Majesty suspect me of dissimulation, I ask?"

"Because I know you well, Monsieur; you cannot repent of having drawn your sword for me."

"Well, in that your Majesty is mistaken, and greatly. Yes, I do repent of having drawn my sword, on account of

the results that action produced; the poor men who were hanged, Sire, were neither your enemies nor mine, and they could not defend themselves."

The king preserved silence for a moment. "And your companion, M. d'Artagnan, does he partake of your repentance?"

"My companion?"

"Yes; you were not alone, I have been told."

"Alone, where?"

"At the Place de Grève."

"No, Sire, no!" said D'Artagnan, blushing at the idea that the king might have a suspicion that he, D'Artagnan, had wished to appropriate to himself the glory that belonged to Raoul; "no, *mordioux!* and as your Majesty says, I had a companion, and a good companion too."

"A young man?"

"Yes, Sire, a young man. Oh! your Majesty must accept my compliments; you are as well informed of things out of doors as of things within. It is M. Colbert who makes all these fine reports to the king."

"M. Colbert has said nothing but good of you, M. d'Artagnan, and he would have met with a bad reception if he had come to tell me anything else."

"That is fortunate."

"But he also said much good of that young man."

"And with justice," said the musketeer.

"In short, it appears that this young man is a hero," said Louis, in order to quicken the sentiment which he mistook for envy.

"A hero! Yes, Sire," repeated D'Artagnan, delighted on his part to direct the king's attention to Raoul.

"Do you know his name?"

"Well, I think —"

"You know him, then?"

"I have known him nearly five-and-twenty years, Sire."

"Why, he is scarcely twenty-five years old!" cried the king.

"Well, then, Sire, I have known him ever since his birth."

"Do you affirm that?"

"Sire," said D'Artagnan, "your Majesty questions me with a mistrust in which I recognize another character than your own. M. Colbert, who has so well informed you, has he then forgotten to tell you that this young man is the son of my most intimate friend?"

"The Vicomte de Bragelonne?"

"Certainly, Sire. The father of the Vicomte de Bragelonne is M. le Comte de la Fère, who so powerfully assisted in the restoration of King Charles II. Bragelonne is of a valiant race, Sire."

"Then he is the son of that nobleman who came to me, or rather to M. de Mazarin, on the part of King Charles II., to offer us his alliance?"

"Exactly, Sire."

"And the Comte de la Fère is also a hero, is he not?"

"Sire, he is a man who has drawn his sword more times for the king your father, than there are at present days in the happy life of your Majesty."

It was Louis XIV. who now bit his lip in his turn.

"That is well, M. d'Artagnan, very well! And M. le Comte de la Fère is your friend, you say?"

"For about forty years; yes, Sire. Your Majesty may see that I do not speak to you of yesterday."

"Would you be glad to see this young man, M. d'Artagnan?"

"Delighted, Sire."

The king touched his bell, and an usher appeared.

"Call M. de Bragelonne," said the king.

"Ah! he is here?" said D'Artagnan.

"He is on guard to-day, at the Louvre, with the company of the gentlemen of Monsieur the Prince."

The king had scarcely ceased speaking, when Raoul presented himself, and on seeing D'Artagnan smiled on him with that charming smile which is found only upon the lips of youth.

"Come, come," said D'Artagnan, familiarly, to Raoul, "the king will allow you to embrace me; only tell his Majesty you thank him."

Raoul bowed so gracefully that Louis, to whom all superior qualities were pleasing when they did not imply anything against his own, admired his beauty, strength, and modesty.

"Monsieur," said the king, addressing Raoul, "I have asked Monsieur the Prince to be kind enough to give you up to me; I have received his reply, and you belong to me from this morning. Monsieur the Prince was a good master, but I hope you will not lose by the change."

"Yes, yes, Raoul, be satisfied; the king has some good in him," said D'Artagnan, who had fathomed the character of Louis, and who played with his self-love within certain limits; always observing, be it understood, the proprieties, and flattering even when he appeared to be bantering.

"Sire," said Bragelonne, with a voice soft and musical, and with the natural and easy elocution he inherited from his father, — "Sire, it is not from to-day only that I belong to your Majesty."

"Oh! I know," said the king; "you mean your enterprise of the Place de Grève. That day you were truly mine, Monsieur."

"Sire, it is not of that day I would speak; it would not become me to refer to so paltry a service in the

presence of a man like M. d'Artagnan. I would speak of a circumstance which created an epoch in my life, and which consecrated me, from the age of sixteen, to the devoted service of your Majesty."

"Ah!" said the king, "and what is that circumstance? Tell me, Monsieur."

"This is it, Sire. When I was setting out on my first campaign,— that is to say, to join the army of Monsieur the Prince, — M. le Comte de la Fère came to conduct me as far as St. Denis, where the remains of King Louis XIII. await, upon the lowest steps of the funereal basilica, a successor, — whom God will not send him, I hope, for many years. Then he made me swear, upon the ashes of our masters, to serve royalty, represented by you, — incarnate in you, Sire, — to serve it in word, in thought, and in deed. I swore; and God and the dead were witnesses to my oath. During ten years, Sire, I have not so often as I desired had occasion to keep it. I am a soldier of your Majesty, and nothing else; and on calling me nearer to you, I do not change my master, I only change my garrison."

Raoul was silent, and bowed. Louis still listened after he had done speaking.

"*Mordioux!*" cried D'Artagnan, "that is well spoken, is it not, your Majesty! A good race! a noble race!"

"Yes," murmured the agitated king, without, however, daring to manifest his emotion, for it had no other cause than the contact with a nature eminently noble, — "yes, Monsieur, you say truly; wherever you were, you were the king's. But in changing your garrison, believe me, you will find an advancement of which you are worthy."

Raoul saw that this ended what the king had wished to say to him; and with the perfect tact which characterized his refined nature, he bowed and retired.

"Is there anything else, Monsieur, of which you have to inform me?" said the king, when he found himself again alone with D'Artagnan.

"Yes, Sire; and I kept that news for the last, for it is sad, and will clothe European royalty in mourning."

"What do you tell me?"

"Sire, in passing through Blois, a word, a sad word, echoed from the palace, struck my ear."

"In truth you terrify me, M. d'Artagnan!"

"Sire, this word was uttered to me by an outrider, who wore crape on his arm."

"My uncle, Gaston of Orleans, perhaps?"

"Sire, he has rendered his last sigh."

"And I was not told of it!" cried the king, whose royal susceptibility saw an insult in the absence of this intelligence.

"Oh, do not be angry, Sire!" said D'Artagnan. "Neither the couriers of Paris, nor the couriers of the whole world, can travel like your servant. The courier from Blois will not be here these two hours; and he rides well, I assure you, seeing that I passed him only on the other side of Orleans."

"My uncle Gaston," murmured Louis, pressing his hand to his brow, and compressing in those three words all that his memory recalled of that name and all his mingled feelings.

"Eh! yes, Sire, it is thus," said D'Artagnan, philosophically replying to the royal thought, "that the past flies away."

"That is true, Monsieur, that is true; but there remains for us, thank God! the future, and we will try to make it not too dark."

"I feel confidence in your Majesty on that head," said D'Artagnan, bowing; "and now —"

"You are right, Monsieur; I had forgotten the hundred and ten leagues you have just ridden. Go, Monsieur, take care of one of the best of soldiers; and when you have rested a little, come and place yourself at my orders."

"Sire, absent or present, I always am so."

D'Artagnan bowed and retired. Then, as if he had only come from Fontainebleau, he quickly traversed the Louvre to rejoin Bragelonne.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A LOVER AND A MISTRESS.

While the wax-lights were burning in the castle of Blois around the inanimate body of Gaston of Orleans, that last representative of the past; while the people of the city were composing his epitaph, which was far from being a panegyric; while Madame the dowager, no longer remembering that in her young days she had loved that senseless corpse to such a degree as to flee from the paternal palace for his sake, was making, within twenty paces of the funeral apartment, her little calculations of interest and her little sacrifices of pride, — other interests and other prides were in agitation in all the parts of the castle into which a living soul could penetrate. Neither the lugubrious sound of the bells, nor the voices of the chanters, nor the splendor of the wax-lights through the windows, nor the preparations for the funeral, had the power to divert the attention of two persons, placed at a window of the inner court, — a window which we are already acquainted with, and which lighted a chamber forming part of what were called the little apartments. For the rest, a joyous beam of sunlight, — for the sun appeared to care very little for the loss France had just suffered, — a sunbeam, we say, descended upon them, drawing perfumes from the neighboring flowers, and animating the walls themselves. These two persons, so occupied, not by the death of the duke, but by the conversation which was the consequence of that death, — these two persons were a young woman and a young man. The latter personage —

a man of from twenty-five to twenty-six years of age, with a mien sometimes lively and sometimes sly, making good use of two immensely large eyes, shaded with long eyelashes — was short of stature and brown of skin ; he smiled with an enormous but well-furnished mouth, and his pointed chin, which appeared to enjoy a mobility which Nature does not ordinarily grant to that portion of the countenance, approached from time to time very lovingly towards his companion, who, we must say, did not always draw back so rapidly as strict propriety might require. The young girl, — we know her, for we have already seen her, at that very same window, by the light of that same sun, — the young girl presented a singular mixture of slyness and reflection. She was charming when she laughed, beautiful when she became serious ; but let us hasten to say she was more frequently charming than beautiful. The two persons appeared to have attained the culminating point of a discussion half bantering, half serious.

"Now, M. Malicorne," said the young girl, "does it, at length, please you that we should talk reasonably ? "

"You believe that that is very easy, Mademoiselle Aure," replied the young man. "To do what we like, when we can only do what we can — "

"Good ! there he is, bewildered in his phrases."

"Who, I ? "

"Yes, you ; leave that lawyers' logic, my dear."

"Another impossibility ; I am a clerk, Mademoiselle de Montalais."

"And I am a lady, M. Malicorne."

"Alas ! I know it well, and you overwhelm me by the distance ; so I will say no more to you."

"Well, but, no, I don't overwhelm you ; say what you have to tell me, — say it, I insist upon it."

"Well, I obey you."

"That is truly fortunate."

"Monsieur is dead."

"Ah, *peste!* there's news! And where do you come from, to be able to tell us that?"

"I come from Orleans, Mademoiselle."

"And is that all the news you bring?"

"Oh, no; I come to tell you that Madame Henrietta of England is coming to marry his Majesty's brother."

"Indeed, Malicorne, you are insupportable with your news of the last century. Now, mind, if you persist in this bad habit of laughing at people, I will have you turned out."

"Oh!"

"Yes; for really you exasperate me."

"There, there! Patience, Mademoiselle!"

"You want to make yourself of consequence; I know well enough why."

"Tell me, and I will answer you frankly yes, if the thing be true."

"You know that I am anxious to have that commission of lady of honor, which I have been foolish enough to ask of you, and you do not use your influence."

"Who, I?" Malicorne cast down his eyes, clasped his hands, and assumed his cunning air. "And what credit can the poor clerk of a public prosecutor have, pray?"

"Your father has not twenty thousand livres a year for nothing, M. Malicorne."

"A provincial fortune, Mademoiselle de Montalais."

"Your father is not in the secrets of Monsieur the Prince for nothing."

"An advantage which is confined to lending Monseigneur money."

"In a word, you are not the most cunning young fellow in the province for nothing?"

"You flatter me."

"Who? I?"

"Yes, you."

"How so?"

"Since I maintain that I have no influence, and you maintain that I have."

"Well, then, my commission?"

"Well, your commission?"

"Shall I have it, or shall I not?"

"You shall have it."

"Ay, but when?"

"When you like."

"Where is it, then?"

"In my pocket."

"How! in your pocket?"

"Yes;" and with a smile Malicorne drew from his pocket a letter, upon which Montalais seized as a prey, and which she read with avidity.

As Montalais read, her face brightened. "Malicorne," exclaimed she, after having read it, "in truth, you are a good lad."

"What for, Mademoiselle?"

"Because you might have been paid for this commission, and you have not been." She burst into a loud laugh, thinking to put the clerk out of countenance; but Malicorne sustained the attack bravely.

"I do not understand you," said he. It was now Montalais who was disconcerted in her turn. "I have declared my sentiments to you," continued Malicorne. "You have told me three times, laughing all the while, that you did not love me; you have kissed me once without laughing, and that is all I want."

"All?" said the proud and coquettish Montalais, in a tone through which wounded pride was visible.

"Absolutely all, Mademoiselle," replied Malicorne.

"Ah!" and this monosyllable indicated as much anger as the young man might have expected gratitude. He shook his head calmly.

"Listen, Montalais," said he, without heeding whether that familiarity pleased his mistress or not; "let us not dispute about that."

"And why not?"

"Because during the year in which I have known you, you might have had me turned out of doors twenty times if I did not please you."

"Indeed; and on what account should I have had you turned out?"

"Because I have been sufficiently impertinent for that."

"Oh, yes, that's true."

"You see plainly that you are forced to avow it," said Malicorne.

"M. Malicorne!"

"Don't let us be angry; if you have retained me, then, it has not been without cause."

"It is not, at least, because I love you," cried Montalais.

"Granted. I will even say that, at this moment, I am certain that you execrate me."

"Oh, you have never spoken so truly."

"Well, on my part, I detest you."

"Ah, I will remember that."

"Do! You find me brutal and foolish; on my part I find you with a harsh voice, and your face distorted with anger. At this moment you would allow yourself to be thrown out of that window rather than allow me to kiss the tip of your finger; I would precipitate myself from the top of the balcony rather than touch the hem of your

robe. But in five minutes you will love me, and I shall adore you. Oh, it is just so!"

"I doubt it."

"And I swear it."

"Coxcomb!"

"And then, that is not the true reason. You stand in need of me, Aure, and I of you. When it pleases you to be gay, I make you laugh; when it suits me to be loving, I look at you. I have given you a commission of lady of honor which you wished for; you will give me, presently, something I wish for."

"I shall?"

"Yes, you will. But at this moment, my dear Aure, I declare to you that I wish for absolutely nothing; so be at ease."

"You are a frightful man, Malicorne; I was going to rejoice at getting this commission, and thus you take away all my joy."

"Good; there is no time lost, — you will rejoice when I am gone."

"Go, then; and after —"

"So be it; but, in the first place, a piece of advice."

"What is it?"

"Keep your good humor; you are ugly when you pout."

"Boor!"

"Come, let us tell the truth to each other, while we are about it."

"Oh, Malicorne! Bad-hearted man!"

"Oh, Montalais! Ungrateful girl!"

The young man leaned his elbow upon the window-frame. Montalais took a book and opened it. Malicorne stood up, brushed his hat with his sleeve, and smoothed down his black doublet. Montalais, though pretending to read, looked at him out of the corner of her eye.

"Good!" cried she, quite furious; "he has assumed his respectful air, and he will sulk for a week."

"A fortnight, Mademoiselle," said Malicorne, bowing.

Montalais raised her little clenched fist. "Monster!" said she; "oh, if I were a man!"

"What would you do to me?"

"I would strangle you."

"Ah! very well, then," said Malicorne; "I believe I begin to desire something."

"And what do you desire, Monsieur Demon? — that I should lose my soul from anger!"

Malicorne was twirling his hat respectfully between his fingers; but all at once he let fall his hat, seized the young girl by the shoulders, pulled her towards him, and applied to her lips two other very warm lips for a man pretending to so much indifference. Aure would have cried out, but the cry was stifled in the kiss. Nervous and irritated, the young girl pushed Malicorne against the wall.

"Good!" said Malicorne, philosophically; "that's enough for six weeks. Adieu, Mademoiselle! Accept my very humble salutation;" and he made three steps towards the door.

"Well! no, you shall not go!" cried Montalais, stamping with her little foot. "Stay where you are! I order you!"

"You order me?"

"Yes; am I not mistress?"

"Of my heart and soul, without doubt."

"A pretty property, in faith! The soul is silly and the heart hard."

"Beware, Montalais, I know you," said Malicorne; "you are going to fall in love with your humble servant."

"Well, yes!" said she, hanging round his neck with

childish indolence rather than with loving abandonment, — "well, yes! for I must thank you, at least."

"And for what?"

"For the commission; is it not my whole future?"

"And all mine."

Montalais looked at him. "It is frightful," said she, "that one can never guess whether you are speaking seriously or not."

"I cannot speak more seriously. I was going to Paris, — you are going there, — we are going there."

"And so it is for that motive only you have served me, selfish fellow!".

"What would you have me say, Aure? I cannot live without you."

"Well, in truth, it is just so with me; you are, nevertheless, it must be confessed, a very bad-hearted young man."

"Aure, my dear Aure, take care! if you take to calling names again, you know the effect they produce upon me, and I shall adore you;" and so saying, Malicorne drew the young girl a second time towards him. But at that instant a step resounded on the staircase. The young people were so close that they would have been surprised in each other's arms if Montalais had not violently pushed Malicorne, who backed against the door, just then opening. A loud cry, followed by angry reproaches, was immediately heard. It was Madame de Saint-Remy who uttered the cry and proffered the angry words. The unlucky Malicorne almost crushed her between the wall and the door through which she was coming.

"It is again that good-for-nothing!" cried the old lady. "Always here!"

"Ah, Madame!" replied Malicorne, in a respectful tone; "it is eight long days since I was here."

CHAPTER XXX.

IN WHICH AT LENGTH THE TRUE HEROINE OF THIS HISTORY APPEARS.

Behind Madame de Saint-Remy came up Mademoiselle de la Vallière. She heard the explosion of maternal anger; and as she divined the cause of it, she entered the room trembling, and perceived the unlucky Malicorne, whose woful countenance would have softened or set laughing whoever might have observed it coolly. He had promptly intrenched himself behind a large chair, as if to avoid the first attacks of Madame de Saint-Remy. He had no hopes of prevailing with words, for she spoke louder than he, and without stopping; but he reckoned upon the eloquence of his gestures. The old lady would neither listen to nor see anything; Malicorne had long been one of her antipathies. But her anger was too great not to overflow from Malicorne to his accomplice. Montalais had her turn.

"And you, Mademoiselle, — you may be certain that I shall inform Madame of what is going on in the apartment of one of her ladies of honor."

"Oh, dear mother!" cried Mademoiselle de la Vallière, "for mercy's sake, spare — "

"Hold your tongue, Mademoiselle, and do not uselessly trouble yourself to intercede for unworthy subjects. That a virtuous girl like you should be subjected to a bad example is, certainly, a misfortune great enough; but

that you should sanction it by your indulgence is what I will not allow."

"But, in truth," said Montalais, rebelling again, "I do not know under what pretence you treat me thus. I am doing no harm, I suppose?"

"And that great good-for-nothing, Mademoiselle," resumed Madame de Saint-Remy, pointing to Malicorne, "is he here to do any good, I ask you?"

"He is here for neither good nor harm, Madame; he comes to see me, — that is all."

"That is all very well, all very well!" said the old lady. "Her royal Highness shall be informed of it, and she will judge."

"At all events," replied Montalais, "I do not see why it should be forbidden that M. Malicorne should have intentions towards me, if his intentions are honorable."

"Honorable intentions with such a face!" cried Madame de Saint-Remy.

"I thank you, in the name of my face, Madame," said Malicorne.

"Come, my daughter, come!" continued Madame de Saint-Remy; "we will go and inform Madame that at the very moment when she is weeping for her husband, at the moment when we are all weeping for a master in this old castle of Blois, the abode of grief, there are people who amuse themselves and make merry."

"Oh!" exclaimed both the accused, with one voice.

"A maid of honor! a maid of honor!" cried the old lady, lifting her hands towards heaven.

"Well, that is where you are mistaken, Madame," said Montalais, highly exasperated; "I am no longer a maid of honor, — of Madame's, at least."

"Have you given in your resignation, Mademoiselle?

That is well! I cannot but applaud such a determination, and I do applaud it."

"I do not give in my resignation, Madame; I take another service, — that is all."

"In the *bourgeoisie* or in the *robe?*" asked Madame de Saint-Remy, disdainfully.

"Please to learn, Madame, that I am not a girl to serve either *bourgeoises* or *robines;* and that, instead of the miserable court at which you vegetate, I am going to reside in a court almost royal."

"Ah! a royal court!" said Madame de Saint-Remy, forcing a laugh, — "a royal court! What think you of that, my daughter?" and she turned round towards Mademoiselle de la Vallière, whom she would by main force have dragged away from Montalais, and who, instead of obeying the impulse of Madame de Saint-Remy, looked first at her mother and then at Montalais with her beautiful conciliating eyes.

"I did not say a royal court, Madame," replied Montalais, "because Madame Henrietta, of England, who is about to become the wife of his royal Highness Monsieur, is not a queen. I said almost royal, and I spoke correctly, since she will be sister-in-law to the king."

A thunderbolt falling upon the castle of Blois would not have astonished Madame de Saint-Remy as did this last sentence of Montalais.

"What do you say of her royal Highness Madame Henrietta?" stammered the old lady.

"I say I am going to belong to her household, as maid of honor; that is what I say."

"As maid of honor!" cried at the same time Madame de Saint-Remy with despair, and Mademoiselle de la Vallière with delight.

"Yes, Madame, as maid of honor."

The old lady's head dropped as if the blow had been too severe for her; but almost immediately recovering herself, she launched a last projectile at her adversary. "Oh!" said she, "I have heard of many of these sorts of promises beforehand, which often lead people to flatter themselves with wild hopes, and at the last moment, when the time comes to keep the promises and have the hopes realized, they are surprised to see the great influence upon which they reckoned reduced to smoke."

"Oh, Madame, the influence of my patron is beyond question, and his promises are as good as acts."

"And would it be indiscreet to ask you the name of this powerful patron?"

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* no; it is that gentleman there," said Montalais, pointing to Malicorne, who during all this scene had preserved the most imperturbable coolness and the most comic dignity.

"Monsieur!" exclaimed Madame de Saint-Remy, with an explosion of hilarity, "Monsieur is your patron! Is the man whose influence is so powerful and whose promises are as good as acts, M. Malicorne?"

Malicorne bowed.

As to Montalais, her sole reply was to draw the commission from her pocket, and show it to the old lady. "Here is the commission," said she.

At once all was over. As soon as she had cast a rapid glance over this fortunate brevet, the good lady clasped her hands, an unspeakable expression of envy and despair contracted her countenance, and she was obliged to sit down to avoid fainting. Montalais was not malicious enough to rejoice extravagantly at her victory, or to overwhelm the conquered enemy, particularly when that enemy was the mother of her friend; she used, then, but did not abuse, her triumph. Malicorne was less

generous; he assumed noble attitudes in his arm-chair, and stretched himself out with a familiarity which two hours earlier would have drawn upon him threats of a caning.

"Maid of honor to the young Madame!" repeated Madame de Saint-Remy, still but half convinced.

"Yes, Madame; and through the patronage of M. Malicorne, moreover."

"It is incredible!" repeated the old lady. "Is it not incredible, Louise?" But Louise did not reply; she was depressed, thoughtful, almost afflicted. Passing one hand over her beautiful brow, she sighed heavily.

"Well, but, Monsieur," said Madame de Saint-Remy, all at once, "how did you manage to obtain this post?"

"I asked for it, Madame."

"Of whom?"

"One of my friends."

"And have you friends sufficiently powerful at court to give you such proofs of their influence?"

"It appears so."

"And may one ask the name of these friends?"

"I did not say I had many friends, Madame; I said I had one friend."

"And that friend is called —"

"Madame, you go too far! When one has a friend as powerful as mine, he does not publish his name in that fashion in open day, in order that he may be stolen from him."

"You are right, Monsieur, to be silent as to the name of that friend; for I think it would be pretty difficult for you to tell it."

"At all events," said Montalais, "if the friend does not exist, the commission does; and that cuts short the question."

"Then I conceive," said Madame de Saint-Remy, with the gracious smile of a cat who is going to scratch, "when I found Monsieur here just now —"

"Well?"

"He brought you your commission."

"Exactly, Madame; you have guessed rightly."

"Well, then, nothing can be more moral or proper."

"I think so, Madame."

"And I have been wrong, as it appears, in reproaching you, Mademoiselle."

"Very wrong, Madame; but I am so accustomed to your reproaches, that I pardon you these."

"In that case let us be gone, Louise; we have nothing further to do but to retire. Well!"

"Madame!" said La Vallière, starting, "did you speak?"

"You do not appear to listen, my child."

"No, Madame, I was thinking."

"About what?"

"A thousand things."

"You bear me no ill-will, at least, Louise?" cried Montalais, pressing her hand.

"And why should I, my dear Aure?" replied the girl, in a voice soft as a flute.

"*Dame!*" resumed Madame de Saint-Remy; "if she did bear you a little ill-will, poor girl, she could not be much blamed."

"And why should she bear me ill-will, good heavens!"

"It appears to me that she is of as good a family, and as pretty as you."

"Mother! mother!" cried Louise.

"Prettier a hundred times, Madame, — of a better family, no; but that does not tell me why Louise should bear me ill-will."

"Do you think it will be very amusing for her to be buried alive at Blois, when you are going to shine at Paris?"

"But, Madame, it is not I who prevent Louise following me thither; on the contrary, I should certainly be most happy if she came there."

"But it appears that M. Malicorne, who is all-powerful at court —"

"Ah! so much the worse, Madame!" said Malicorne; "every one for himself in this poor world."

"Malicorne!" said Montalais. Then stooping towards the young man · "Engage Madame de Saint-Remy, either in disputing with her or making up with her; I must speak to Louise;" and at the same time a soft pressure of the hand recompensed Malicorne for the obedience which was to follow.

Malicorne went grumbling towards Madame de Saint-Remy; while Montalais said to her friend, throwing one arm round her neck: "What is the matter, say? Is it true that you would not love me if I were to shine, as your mother says?"

"Oh, no!" said the young girl, with difficulty restraining her tears; "on the contrary, I rejoice at your good fortune."

"Rejoice! why, one would say you are ready to cry!"

"Do people never weep but from envy?"

"Oh! yes, I understand. I am going to Paris, and that word Paris recalls to your mind a certain cavalier —"

"Aure!"

"A certain cavalier who formerly lived near Blois and who now resides at Paris."

"In truth, I know not what ails me, but I feel stifled."

"Weep, then, weep, as you cannot give me a smile!"

Louise raised her sweet face, which the tears, rolling down one after the other, illumined like diamonds.

"Come, confess!" said Montalais.

"What shall I confess?"

"What makes you weep; people don't weep without a cause. I am your friend; whatever you would wish me to do, I will do. Malicorne is more powerful than you would think. Do you wish to come to Paris?"

"Alas!" sighed Louise.

"Do you wish to come to Paris?"

"To remain here alone in this old castle, I who have enjoyed the sweet habit of listening to your songs, of pressing your hand, of running about the park with you! Oh, how dull I shall be, how quickly I shall die!"

"Do you wish to come to Paris?"

Louise breathed another sigh.

"You do not answer me."

"What would you that I should answer you?"

"Yes or no; that is not very difficult, I think."

"Oh! you are very fortunate, Montalais!"

"That is to say you would like to be in my place."

Louise was silent.

"Little obstinate thing!" said Montalais; "did ever any one keep her secrets from her friend thus? But confess that you would like to come to Paris; confess that you are dying with the wish to see Raoul again."

"I cannot confess that."

"Then you are wrong."

"Why?"

"Because — Do you see this commission?"

"To be sure I do."

"Well, I would have procured for you one like it."

"By whose means?"

"Malicorne's."

"Aure, do you tell the truth? Is that possible?"

"*Dame!* Malicorne is there; and what he has done for me, he must do for you."

Malicorne had heard his name pronounced twice; he was delighted at having an opportunity to get through with Madame de Saint-Remy, and he turned round: "What is that, Mademoiselle?"

"Come hither, Malicorne!" said Montalais, with an imperious gesture. Malicorne obeyed.

"A commission like this!" said Montalais.

"How so?"

"A commission like this; that is plain enough."

"But —"

"I want one; I must have one!"

"Oh, you must have one!"

"Yes."

"It is impossible, is it not, M. Malicorne?" said Louise, with her sweet, soft voice.

"*Dame!* if it is for you, Mademoiselle —"

"For me. Yes, M. Malicorne, it would be for me."

"And if Mademoiselle de Montalais asks it at the same time —"

"Mademoiselle de Montalais does not ask it, she demands it."

"Well, we will endeavor to obey you, Mademoiselle."

"And you will have her appointed?"

"We will try."

"No evasive reply. Louise de la Vallière shall be maid of honor to Madame Henrietta within a week."

"How you go on!"

"Within a week, or else —"

"Well! or else —"

"You may take back your commission, M. Malicorne; I will not leave my friend."

"Dear Montalais!"

"Very well, keep your commission; Mademoiselle de la Vallière shall be a maid of honor."

"Is that true?"

"Quite true."

"I may then hope to go to Paris?"

"Depend upon it."

"Oh, M. Malicorne, what goodness!" cried Louise, clapping her hands and bounding with joy.

"Little dissembler!" said Montalais, "try again to make me believe you are not in love with Raoul."

Louise blushed like a rose in June, but instead of replying, ran and kissed her mother. "Madame," said she, "do you know that M. Malicorne is going to have me appointed maid of honor?"

"M. Malicorne is a prince in disguise," replied the old lady; "he is all-powerful."

"Would you also like to be maid of honor?" asked Malicorne of Madame de Saint-Remy. "While I am about it, I might as well get everybody appointed;" and upon that he went away, leaving the poor lady quite disconcerted, as Tallemant des Réaux would say.

"Humph!" murmured Malicorne, as he descended the stairs, — "humph! there is another thousand livres that I must pay; but I must get through as well as I can. My friend Manicamp does nothing for nothing."

CHAPTER XXXI.

MALICORNE AND MANICAMP.

The introduction of these two new personages into this history, and that mysterious affinity of names and sentiments, merit some attention on the part of the historian and the reader. We will then enter into some details concerning M. Malicorne and M. de Manicamp. Malicorne, we know, had made the journey to Orleans in search of the commission destined for Mademoiselle de Montalais, the arrival of which had produced such a great sensation at the castle of Blois. At that moment M. de Manicamp was at Orleans. A singular personage was this M. de Manicamp; a very intelligent young fellow, always poor, always needy, although he dipped his hand freely into the purse of M. le Comte de Guiche, one of the best-furnished purses of the period. M. le Comte de Guiche had had as the companion of his boyhood this Manicamp, a poor gentleman vassal, born of the house of Grammont. M. de Manicamp, by his intelligence, had created himself a revenue in the opulent family of the celebrated marshal. From his infancy he had, by a calculation much in advance of his age, lent his name and his complaisance to the follies of the Comte de Guiche. If his noble companion had stolen some fruit destined for Madame la Maréchale, if he had broken a mirror or put out a dog's eye, Manicamp declared himself guilty of the crime committed, and received the punishment, which was not made the milder for falling upon the innocent.

But this system of abnegation was profitable; instead of wearing such mean habiliments as his paternal fortunes entitled him to, he was able to appear brilliant, superb, like a young noble of fifty thousand livres a year.

It was not that he was mean in character or humble in spirit; no, he was a philosopher, or rather he had the indifference, the apathy, the extravagance which banish from man every feeling of the hierarchical world. His sole ambition was to spend money. But in this respect the worthy M. de Manicamp was a gulf. Three or four times every year regularly he drained the Comte de Guiche; and when the Comte de Guiche was thoroughly drained, when he had turned out his pockets and his purse before him, and declared that it would be at least a fortnight before paternal munificence would refill those pockets and that purse, Manicamp lost all his energy: he went to bed, remained there, ate nothing, and sold his fine clothes, under the pretence that, remaining in bed, he did not want them. During this prostration of mind and strength the purse of the Comte de Guiche was getting full again, and when once filled, overflowed into that of Manicamp, who bought new clothes, dressed himself again, and recommenced the same life he had followed before. This mania of selling his new clothes for a quarter of what they were worth had rendered our hero quite celebrated in Orleans, a city where generally — why, we should be puzzled to say — he came to pass his days of penitence. Provincial debauchees, fops of six hundred livres a year, shared the leavings of his opulence.

Among the admirers of these splendid toilettes, our friend Malicorne was conspicuous; he was the son of a syndic of the city, of whom M. le Prince de Condé, always needy like a Condé, often borrowed money at enormous interest. M. Malicorne kept the paternal money-chest;

that is to say, in those times of easy morals he had made for himself, by following the example of his father, and lending at high interest for short terms, a revenue of eighteen hundred livres, without reckoning six hundred other livres furnished by the generosity of the syndic; so that Malicorne was the king of the gay youth of Orleans, having twenty-four hundred livres to scatter, squander, and waste on follies of every kind. But, quite in contrast to Manicamp, Malicorne was terribly ambitious. He loved from ambition, he spent money from ambition, and he would have ruined himself from ambition.

Malicorne had determined to rise, at whatever price it might cost; and for this, at whatever price it did cost, he had given himself a mistress and a friend. The mistress, Mademoiselle de Montalais, was cruel, as regarded the highest favors of love; but she was of a noble family, and that was sufficient for Malicorne. The friend had no friendship, but he was the favorite of the Comte de Guiche, himself the friend of Monsieur the king's brother; and that was sufficient for Malicorne. Only, in the chapter of charges, Mademoiselle de Montalais cost *per annum*, in ribbons, gloves, and sweets, a thousand livres; Manicamp cost — money lent, never returned — from twelve to fifteen hundred livres *per annum:* so that there was nothing left for Malicorne. Ah, yes, we are mistaken; there was left the paternal strong-box. He employed a mode of proceeding, upon which he preserved the most profound secrecy, and which consisted in advancing to himself, from the coffer of the syndic, half a dozen years, that is to say, fifteen thousand livres, swearing to himself — observe, quite to himself — to repay this deficiency as soon as an opportunity should present itself. The opportunity was expected to be the concession of a good post in the household of Monsieur, when that household should

be established at the period of his marriage. This period had arrived, and the household was at last about to be established.

A good post in the family of a prince of the blood, when it is given by the influence and on the recommendation of such a friend as the Comte de Guiche, is worth at least twelve thousand livres *per annum;* and by the means which M. Malicorne had taken to make his revenues fructify, twelve thousand livres might rise to twenty thousand. Then, when once an incumbent of this post, he would marry Mademoiselle de Montalais. Mademoiselle de Montalais, of a family which the woman's side ennobles, not only would be dowered, but would ennoble Malicorne. But in order that Mademoiselle de Montalais, who had not a large patrimonial fortune, although an only daughter, might be suitably dowered, it was necessary that she should belong to some great princess as prodigal as the dowager Madame was covetous; and in order that the wife should not be on one side while the husband was on the other, — a situation which presents serious inconveniences, particularly with characters like those of the future consorts, — Malicorne had conceived the idea of making the central point of union the household of Monsieur the king's brother. Mademoiselle de Montalais would be maid of honor to Madame. M. Malicorne would be officer to Monsieur.

It is plain that the plan was formed by a clear head; it is plain, also, that it had been bravely executed. Malicorne had asked Manicamp to ask the Comte de Guiche for a commission of maid of honor; and the Comte de Guiche had asked this commission of Monsieur, who had signed it without hesitation. The moral plan of Malicorne, — for we may well suppose that the combinations of a mind as active as his were not confined to the present,

but extended to the future, — the moral plan of Malicorne, we say, was this : to obtain entrance into the household of Madame Henrietta for a woman devoted to himself, who was intelligent, young, handsome, and intriguing; to learn, by means of this woman, all the feminine secrets of the young household; while he, Malicorne, and his friend Manicamp should between them know all the male secrets of the young community. By these means a rapid and splendid fortune might be acquired. Malicorne was a vile name, — he who bore it had too much wit to conceal this truth from himself, — but an estate might be purchased; and Malicorne of some place, or even Malicorne itself, quite short, would sound nobly in the ear.

It was not improbable that a most aristocratic origin might be found for this name of Malicorne; might it not come from some estate where a bull with fatal horns had caused some great misfortune, and baptized the soil with the blood it had spilt? It is true, this plan presented itself bristling with difficulties; but the greatest of all was Mademoiselle de Montalais herself. Capricious, variable, sly, giddy, free, prudish, a virgin armed with claws, Erigone stained with grapes, she sometimes overturned, with a single dash of her white fingers or with a single puff from her laughing lips, the edifice which had employed the patience of Malicorne a month to establish.

Love aside, Malicorne was happy; but this love which he could not help feeling, he had the strength carefully to conceal, persuaded that at the least relaxing of the ties by which he had bound his Protean sweetheart, the demon would overthrow him and laugh at him. He humbled his mistress by disdaining her. Burning with desire when she advanced to tempt him, he had the art to appear like ice, persuaded that if he opened his arms

she would run away laughing at him. On her side, Montalais believed that she did not love Malicorne ; while, on the contrary, she did love him. Malicorne repeated to her so often his protestations of indifference, that she finished, sometimes, by believing him ; and then she believed she detested him. If she tried to bring him back by coquetry, Malicorne played at coquetry better than she could. But what made Montalais hold to Malicorne inseparably was that Malicorne always came cram-full of fresh news brought from the court and the city ; that he always brought to Blois a fashion, a secret, or a perfume ; that he never asked for a meeting, but, on the contrary, required to be supplicated to receive the favors he burned to obtain. On her side, Montalais was no miser with stories. By her means Malicorne learned all that passed in the family of the dowager Madame ; and he related to Manicamp tales that made him ready to die with laughing, which the latter out of idleness took ready-made to M. de Guiche, who carried them to Monsieur.

Such, in short, was the woof of petty interests and petty conspiracies which united Blois with Orleans, and Orleans with Paris ; and which was about to bring into the last-named city, where she was to produce so great a revolution, the poor little La Vallière, who was far from suspecting, as she returned joyfully, leaning on the arm of her mother, for what a strange future she was reserved. As to the good man, Malicorne, — we speak of the syndic of Orleans, — he did not see more clearly into the present than others did into the future ; and had no suspicion, as he walked every day, between three and five o'clock, after his dinner, upon the Place Ste.-Catherine, in his gray coat, cut after the fashion of Louis XIII., and his cloth shoes with great knots of ribbon, that it was he

who paid for all those bursts of laughter, all those stolen kisses, all those whisperings, all that ribbonry, and all those bubble projects which formed a chain of forty-five leagues in length, from the palais of Blois to the Palais-Royal.

CHAPTER XXXII.

MANICAMP AND MALICORNE.

Malicorne left Blois, as we have said, and went to find his friend Manicamp, then in temporary retreat in the city of Orleans. It was just at the moment when that young nobleman was employed in selling the last piece of decent clothing he had left. He had, a fortnight before, extorted from the Comte de Guiche a hundred pistoles, all he had to assist in equipping him properly to go and meet Madame, on her arrival at Havre. He had drawn from Malicorne, three days before, fifty pistoles, the price of the commission obtained for Montalais. He had then no expectations of anything else, having exhausted all his resources, with the exception of selling a handsome suit of cloth and satin, all embroidered and laced with gold, which had been the admiration of the court. But to be able to sell this suit, the last he had left, — as we have been forced to confess to the reader, — Manicamp had been obliged to take to his bed. No more fire, no more pocket-money, no more walking-money ; nothing but sleep to take the place of banquets, companies, and balls. It has been said, "He who sleeps, dines ;" but it has not been said, He who sleeps, plays ; or, He who sleeps, dances. Manicamp, reduced to this extremity of neither playing nor dancing for a week at least, was consequently very sad ; he was expecting a usurer, and saw Malicorne enter. A cry of distress escaped him.

"Eh! what!" said he, in a tone which nothing can describe, "is that you again, dear friend?"

"Humph! you are very polite!" said Malicorne.

"Ay; but, look you, I was expecting money, and instead of the money, I see you come."

"And suppose I brought you some money?"

"Oh, then it is quite another thing! You are very welcome, my dear friend!" and he held out his hand, not for the hand of Malicorne, but for his purse. Malicorne pretended to be mistaken, and gave him his hand.

"And the money?" said Manicamp.

"My dear friend, if you wish to have it, earn it."

"What must be done for it?"

"Earn it, *parbleu!*"

"And in what way?"

"Oh, it is hard, I warn you!"

"The devil!"

"You must get out of bed, and go immediately to M. le Comte de Guiche."

"I get up!" said Manicamp, stretching himself in his bed voluptuously; "oh, no, thank you!"

"You have, then, sold all your clothes?"

"No; I have one suit left, — the handsomest even, — but I expect a purchaser."

"And the hose?"

"Well, if you look, you can see them on that chair."

"Very well; since you have some hose and a doublet left, put your legs into the first and your back into the other, have a horse saddled, and set off."

"Not I."

"And why not?"

"*Morbleu!* don't you know, then, that M. de Guiche is at Étampes?"

"No; I thought he was at Paris. You will have then only fifteen leagues to go, instead of thirty."

"You are a wonderfully clever fellow! If I were to ride fifteen leagues in these clothes, they would never be fit to put on again; and instead of selling them for thirty pistoles, I should be obliged to take fifteen for them."

"Sell them for what you like, but I must have a second commission of maid of honor."

"Good! For whom? Is Montalais doubled, then?"

"Vile fellow! It is you who are doubled; you swallow up two fortunes, — mine and that of M. le Comte de Guiche."

"You should say that of M. le Comte de Guiche and yours."

"That is true, — honor where it is due; but I return to my commission."

"And you are wrong."

"Prove me that."

"My friend, there will be only twelve maids of honor for Madame; I have already obtained for you what twelve hundred women are trying for, and for that I was forced to employ diplomacy."

"Oh, yes, I know you have been quite heroic, my dear friend."

"We know what we are about," said Manicamp.

"To whom do you tell that? When I am king, I promise you one thing."

"What? To call yourself Malicorne I.?"

"No; to make you superintendent of my finances. But that is not the question now."

"Unfortunately."

"The present affair is to procure for me a second place of maid of honor."

"My friend, if you were to promise me heaven I would not disturb myself at this moment."

Malicorne chinked the money in his pocket. "There are twenty pistoles here," said he.

"And what would you do with twenty pistoles, *mon Dieu!*"

"Well," said Malicorne, a little angrily, "suppose I were only to add them to the five hundred you already owe me?"

"You are right," replied Manicamp, stretching out his hand again, "and in that point of view I can accept them. Give them to me."

"One moment. What the devil! it is not only holding out your hand that will do; if I give you the twenty pistoles, shall I have my commission?"

"To be sure you shall."

"Soon?"

"To-day."

"Oh, take care, M. de Manicamp! You undertake much, and I do not ask all that. Thirty leagues in one day is too much, and you would kill yourself."

"I think nothing impossible when obliging a friend."

"You are quite heroic."

"Where are the twenty pistoles?"

"Here they are," said Malicorne, showing them.

"That is well."

"Yes; but, my dear M. Manicamp, you would consume them in nothing but post-horses."

"No, no; make yourself easy on that head."

"Pardon me; why, it is fifteen leagues from this place to Étampes."

"Fourteen."

"Well, fourteen be it. Fourteen leagues make seven posts, at twenty sous the post, seven livres; seven livres

the courier, fourteen; as many for coming back, twenty-eight; as much for bed and supper, — that makes sixty of the livres which this accommodation would cost you."

Manicamp stretched himself like a serpent in his bed, and fixing his two great eyes upon Malicorne, "You are right," said he; "I could not return before to-morrow;" and he took the twenty pistoles.

"Now, then, be off!"

"Well, as I cannot be back before to-morrow, we have time."

"Time for what?"

"Time to play."

"What do you wish to play with?"

"Your twenty pistoles, *pardieu!*"

"No; you always win."

"I will wager them, then."

"Against what?"

"Against twenty others."

"And what shall be the object of the wager?"

"This. We have said it was fourteen leagues to Étampes?"

"Yes."

"And fourteen leagues back?"

"Yes."

"Consequently twenty-eight leagues."

"Doubtless."

"Well, for these twenty-eight leagues you cannot allow less than fourteen hours?"

"That is agreed."

"One hour to find the Comte de Guiche."

"Go on."

"And an hour to persuade him to write a letter to Monsieur."

"Just so."

"Sixteen hours in all."

"You reckon as well as M. Colbert."

"It is now twelve o'clock."

"Half-past."

"Humph! you have a fine watch."

"What were you saying?" said Malicorne, putting his watch back into his fob.

"Ah! true; I was offering to lay you twenty pistoles against these you have lent me, that you will have the Comte de Guiche's letter in —"

"How soon?"

"In eight hours."

"Have you a winged horse?"

"That is my affair. Will you wager?"

"I shall have the count's letter in eight hours?"

"Yes."

"Signed?"

"Yes."

"In hand?"

"In hand."

"Well, be it so; I wager," said Malicorne, curious to know how this seller of clothes would get through.

"Is it agreed?"

"It is."

"Pass me the pen, ink, and paper."

"Here they are."

"Thank you."

Manicamp raised himself with a sigh, and leaning on his left arm, in his best hand traced the following lines: —

An order for a place of maid of honor to Madame, which M. le Comte de Guiche will take upon him to obtain at sight.

De Manicamp.

This painful task accomplished, he stretched himself at full length again.

"Well!" asked Malicorne, "what does this mean?"

"That means that if you are in a hurry to have the letter from the Comte de Guiche for Monsieur, I have won my wager."

"How the devil is that?"

"That is transparent enough, I think; you take that paper."

"Well?"

"And you set out instead of me."

"Ah!"

"You put your horses to their best speed."

"Good!"

"In six hours you will be at Étampes; in seven hours you have the letter from the count, and I shall have won my wager without having stirred from my bed, — which suits me and you too at the same time, I am very sure."

"Decidedly, Manicamp, you are a great man."

"I know that."

"I am to start, then, for Étampes?"

"Directly."

"I am to go to the Comte de Guiche with this order?"

"He will give you a similar one for Monsieur."

"I am to go to Paris."

"You will go and find Monsieur with the Comte de Guiche's order."

"Monsieur will approve?"

"Instantly."

"And I shall have my commission?"

"You shall."

"Ah!"

"Well, I hope I behave properly?"

"Admirably."

"Thank you."

"You do as you please, then, with the Comte de Guiche, my dear Manicamp?"

"Except making money of him, — everything."

"*Diable!* the exception is annoying; but then, if instead of asking him for money, you were to ask —"

"What?"

"Something important."

"What do you call important?"

"Well, suppose one of your friends asked you to render him a service?"

"I would not render it to him."

"Selfish fellow!"

"Or at least I would ask him what service he would render me in exchange."

"Ah! that is fair. Well, that friend speaks to you."

"What! you, Malicorne!"

"Yes; it is I."

"Ah! you are rich, then?"

"I have still fifty pistoles left."

"Exactly the sum I want. Where are those fifty pistoles?"

"Here," said Malicorne, slapping his pocket.

"Then speak, my friend; what do you want?"

Malicorne took up the pen, ink, and paper again, and presented them all to Manicamp. "Write!" said he.

"Dictate!"

"An order for a place in the household of Monsieur."

"Oh!" said Manicamp, laying down the pen, "a place in the household of Monsieur for fifty pistoles?"

"You mistook me, my friend; you did not hear plainly."

"What did you say, then?"

"I said five hundred."

"And the five hundred?"

"Here they are."

Manicamp devoured the *rouleau* with his eyes; but this time Malicorne held it at a distance. "Eh! what do you say to that? Five hundred pistoles."

"I say it is for nothing, my friend," said Manicamp, taking up the pen again, "and you will wear out my credit. Dictate!"

Malicorne continued: —

"Which my friend the Comte de Guiche will obtain from Monsieur for my friend Malicorne."

"There you are!" said Manicamp.

"Pardon me, you have forgotten to sign."

"Ah! that is true. The five hundred pistoles?"

"Here are two hundred and fifty of them."

"And the other two hundred and fifty?"

"When I shall be in possession of my place."

Manicamp made a face.

"In that case give me the recommendation back again."

"What for?"

"To add two words to it."

"Two words?"

"Yes; two words only."

"What are they?"

"'In haste.'"

Malicorne returned the recommendation; Manicamp added the words.

"Good!" said Malicorne, taking back the paper.

Manicamp began to count the pistoles. "There are twenty wanting," said he.

"How so?"

"The twenty I have won."

"In what way?"

"By wagering that you would have the letter from the Comte de Guiche in eight hours."

"That 's fair;" and he gave him the twenty pistoles.

Manicamp began to take up his gold by handfuls, and pour it down in cascades upon his bed.

"This second place," murmured Malicorne, while drying his paper, "which, at the first glance, appears to cost me more than the first, but — "

He stopped, took up the pen in his turn, and wrote to Montalais: —

MADEMOISELLE, — Announce to your friend that her commission will not be long in arriving. I am setting out to get it signed; that will be eighty-six leagues I shall have gone for the love of you.

Then with his cunning smile, resuming his broken soliloquy, "This place," said he, "at the first glance, appears to cost me more than the first; but the benefit will be, I hope, in proportion to the expense, and Mademoiselle de la Vallière will bring me back more than Mademoiselle de Montalais, or else — or else my name is not Malicorne. Farewell, Manicamp!" and he left the room.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE COURTYARD OF THE HÔTEL GRAMMONT.

When Malicorne arrived at Étampes, he was informed that the Comte de Guiche had just set out for Paris. He took a two hours' rest, and then prepared to continue his journey. He reached Paris during the night, and alighted at a small hotel which he had frequented in his previous journeys to the capital, and at eight o'clock the next morning presented himself at the Hôtel Grammont. Malicorne arrived just in time; for the Comte de Guiche was on the point of taking leave of Monsieur before setting out for Havre, where the *élite* of the French nobility had gone to await Madame's arrival from England. Malicorne pronounced the name of Manicamp, and was immediately admitted. He found the Comte de Guiche in the courtyard of the Hôtel Grammont, inspecting his horses, which his trainers and equerries were passing in review before him. The count, in the presence of his tradespeople and of his servants, was engaged in praising or blaming, as the case seemed to deserve, the appointments, horses, and harness which were submitted to his inspection, when, in the midst of this important occupation, the name of Manicamp was announced.

"Manicamp!" he exclaimed; "let him enter by all means;" and he advanced a few steps towards the door.

Malicorne slipped through the half-open door, and looking at the Comte de Guiche, who was surprised to see a face which he did not recognize instead of the one he

expected, said: "Forgive me, Monsieur the Count, but I believe a mistake has been made. M. Manicamp himself was announced to you, instead of which it is only an envoy from him."

"Ah!" said De Guiche, rather coldly; "and what do you bring me?"

"A letter, Monsieur the Count." Malicorne handed him the document, and narrowly watched the count's face, who, as he read it, began to laugh.

"What!" he exclaimed, "another maid of honor? Are all the maids of honor in France, then, under his protection?" Malicorne bowed. "Why does he not come himself?" De Guiche inquired.

"He is confined to his bed."

"The deuce! he has no money, then, I suppose," said De Guiche, shrugging his shoulders. "But what does he do with his money?"

Malicorne made a movement to indicate that upon this subject he was as ignorant as the count himself.

"Then why does he not make use of his credit?" continued De Guiche.

"With regard to that, I think—"

"What?"

"That Manicamp has credit with no one but yourself, Monsieur the Count."

"He will not be at Havre, then?"

Whereupon Malicorne made another movement.

"It seems to be impossible, and yet every one will be there."

"I trust, Monsieur the Count, that he will not neglect so excellent an opportunity."

"He should be at Paris by this time."

"He will take the cross road, to make up for lost time."

"Where is he now?"

"At Orleans."

"Monsieur," said De Guiche, bowing, "you seem to me a man of very good taste."

Malicorne wore Manicamp's clothes. He bowed in return, saying, "You do me very great honor, Monsieur."

"Whom have I the pleasure of addressing?"

"My name is Malicorne, Monsieur."

"M. de Malicorne, what do you think of these pistol-holsters?"

Malicorne was a man of great readiness, and immediately understood the situation. Besides, the "de" which De Guiche had prefixed to Malicorne's name raised him to the rank of the person with whom he was conversing. He looked at the holsters with the air of a connoisseur, and said, without hesitation, "Somewhat heavy, Monsieur."

"You see," said De Guiche to the saddler, "this gentleman, who is a man of taste, thinks your holsters heavy, — a complaint I had already made." The saddler was full of excuses.

"And what do you think," asked De Guiche, "of this horse, which is a purchase I have just made?"

"To look at him, he seems perfect, Monsieur the Count; but I must mount him before I give you my opinion."

"Do so, M. de Malicorne, and ride him round the court two or three times."

The courtyard of the hotel was so arranged that whenever there was any occasion for it, it could be used as a riding-school. Malicorne, with perfect ease, arranged the curb and snaffle-reins, placed his left hand on the horse's mane, and with his foot in the stirrup raised himself to the saddle. At first he made the horse walk the whole circuit of the courtyard at a foot-pace; next at a trot; lastly at a gallop. He then drew up close to the count, dismounted, and threw the bridle to a groom standing by.

"Well," said the count, "what do you think of it, M. de Malicorne?"

"This horse, Monsieur the Count," said Malicorne, "is of the Mecklenburg breed. In looking to see whether the bit suited his mouth, I saw that he was rising seven, the very age when the training of a war-horse should begin. The fore-hand is light. A horse which holds his head high, it is said, never tires his rider's hand. The withers are rather low. The drooping of the hind-quarters would almost make me doubt the purity of its German breed, and I think there is English blood in him. He stands well on his legs, but he trots high, and may cut himself, which requires attention to be paid to his shoeing. He is tractable; and as I made him turn round and change his feet, I found him quick and ready in doing so."

"Well said, M. de Malicorne," exclaimed the count; "you are a judge of horses, I perceive;" then, turning toward the new arrival again, he continued: "You are most becomingly dressed, M. de Malicorne. That is not a provincial cut, I presume. Such a style of dress is not to be met with at Tours or Orleans."

"No, Monsieur the Count; my clothes were made at Paris."

"There is no doubt of that. But let us resume our own affair. Manicamp wishes, then, for the appointment of a second maid of honor."

"You perceive what he has written, Monsieur the Count."

"For whom was the first appointment?"

Malicorne felt the color rise in his face, as he answered hurriedly, "A charming maid of honor, Mademoiselle de Montalais."

"Ah! you are acquainted with her?"

"We are affianced, or nearly so."

"That is quite another thing, then; a thousand compliments," exclaimed De Guiche, upon whose lips a courtier's jest was already flitting, but to whom the word "affianced," applied by Malicorne to Mademoiselle de Montalais, recalled the respect due to women.

"And for whom is the second appointment destined?" inquired De Guiche; "is it for any one to whom Manicamp may happen to be affianced? In that case I pity her, poor girl! for she will have a sad fellow for a husband."

"No, Monsieur the Count; the second appointment is for Mademoiselle de la Baume le Blanc de la Vallière."

"Unknown," said De Guiche.

"Unknown? yes, Monsieur," said Malicorne, smiling in his turn.

"Very good. I will speak to Monsieur about it. By the by, she is of gentle birth?"

"She belongs to a very good family, and is maid of honor to Madame the Dowager."

"Very well. Will you accompany me to Monsieur?"

"Most certainly, if I may be permitted the honor."

"Have you your carriage?"

"No; I came here on horseback."

"Dressed as you are?"

"No, Monsieur; I posted from Orleans, and changed my travelling suit for the one I have on, in order to present myself to you."

"True, you have already told me you came from Orleans;" saying which he crumpled Manicamp's letter in his hand, and thrust it in his pocket.

"Monsieur," said Malicorne, timidly, "I do not think you have read all."

"Not read all, do you say?"

"No; there were two letters in the same envelope."

"Oh! are you sure?"

"Quite sure."

"Let us look, then," said the count, as he opened the letter again.

"Ah! you are right," he said, opening the paper which he had not yet read.

"I suspected it," he continued; "another application for an appointment under Monsieur. This Manicamp is a perfect gulf; he is carrying on a trade in it."

"No, Monsieur the Count; he wishes to make a present of it."

"To whom?"

"To myself, Monsieur."

"Why did you not say so at once, my dear M. de Mauvaisecorne?"

"Malicorne, Monsieur the Count."

"Forgive me; it is the Latin which bothers me, — that terrible habit of derivations. Why the deuce are young men of family taught Latin? *Mala* and *mauvaise*, — you understand it is the same thing. You will forgive me, I trust, M. de Malicorne."

"Your kindness affects me much, Monsieur; but it is a reason why I should make you acquainted with one circumstance without any delay."

"What is it, Monsieur?"

"That I was not born a gentleman. I am not without courage, and not altogether deficient in ability; but my name is Malicorne simply."

"You appear to me, Monsieur," exclaimed the count, looking at the astute face of his companion, "to be a most agreeable man. Your face pleases me, M. Malicorne; and you must possess some indisputably excellent qualities to have pleased that egotistical Manicamp. Be candid, and tell me whether you are not some saint descended upon the earth."

"Why so?"

"For the simple reason that he makes you a present of anything. Did you not say that he intended to make you a present of some appointment in the king's household?"

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur the Count; but if I succeed in obtaining the appointment, you, and not he, will have bestowed it on me."

"Besides, he will not have given it to you for nothing, I suppose. Stay, I have it! — there is a Malicorne at Orleans, who lends money to the prince."

"I think that must be my father, Monsieur."

"Ah! the prince has the father, and that terrible devourer of a Manicamp has the son. Take care, Monsieur! I know him. He will fleece you completely."

"The only difference is that I lend without interest," said Malicorne, smiling.

"I was correct in saying that you were a saint, or that you very much resembled one. M. Malicorne, you shall have the post you want, or I will forfeit my name."

"Ah! Monsieur the Count, what a debt of gratitude shall I not owe you!" said Malicorne, enraptured.

"Let us go to the prince, my dear M. Malicorne;" and De Guiche proceeded towards the door, desiring Malicorne to follow him.

At the very moment they were about to cross the threshold, a young man appeared on the other side. He was from twenty-four to twenty-five years of age, of pale complexion, thin lips, bright eyes, and brown hair and eyebrows. "Good-day," he said, suddenly, almost pushing De Guiche back into the courtyard again.

"Ah! is that you, De Wardes? What! and booted, spurred, and whip in hand too?"

"The most befitting costume for a man about to set

off for Havre. There will be no one left in Paris to-morrow;" and the new-comer saluted Malicorne with great ceremony, whose handsome dress gave him the appearance of a prince in rank.

"M. Malicorne," said De Guiche to his friend. De Wardes bowed.

"M. de Wardes," said De Guiche to Malicorne, who bowed in return. "By the by, De Wardes," continued De Guiche, "you who are on the watch for this sort of thing, can you tell us what appointments are still vacant at the Court, or rather in the prince's household?"

"In the prince's household," said De Wardes, looking up with an air of consideration; "let me see, — that of the master of the horse is vacant, I believe."

"Oh," exclaimed Malicorne, "there is no question of such a post as that, Monsieur; my ambition is not nearly so exalted."

De Wardes had a more penetrating observation than De Guiche, and he understood Malicorne immediately. "The fact is," he said, looking at him from head to foot, "a man must be either a duke or a peer to fill that post."

"All I solicit," said Malicorne, "is a very humble appointment; I am of little importance, and I do not rank myself above my position."

"M. Malicorne, whom you see here," said De Guiche to De Wardes, "is a very excellent fellow, whose only misfortune is that of not being of gentle birth. But as far as I am concerned, you know, I attach little value to those who have gentle birth alone to boast of."

"Assuredly," said De Wardes; "but will you allow me to remark, my dear count, that, without rank of some sort, one can hardly hope to belong to his royal Highness's household."

"You are right," said the count; "the etiquette is very

strict with regard to such matters. The deuce! we never thought of that."

"Alas! a sad misfortune for me, Monsieur the Count!" said Malicorne, changing color slightly.

"Yet not without remedy, I hope," returned De Guiche.

"The remedy is found easily enough," exclaimed De Wardes; "you can be created a gentleman, my dear Monsieur. His Eminence the Cardinal Mazarin did nothing else from morning till night."

"Hush, hush, De Wardes!" said the count; "no jests of that kind; it ill becomes us to turn such matters into ridicule. Letters of nobility, it is true, are purchasable; but that is a sufficient misfortune without the nobles themselves laughing at it."

"Upon my word, De Guiche, you 're quite a Puritan, as the English say."

At this moment the Vicomte de Bragelonne was announced by one of the servants in the courtyard, in precisely the same manner as he would have done in a salon.

"Come here, my dear Raoul. What! you, too, booted and spurred? You are setting off, then?"

Bragelonne approached the group of young men, and saluted them with that quiet and serious manner which was peculiar to him. His salutation was principally addressed to De Wardes, with whom he was unacquainted, and whose features, on perceiving Raoul, had assumed a strange sternness of expression. "I have come, De Guiche," he said, "to ask your companionship. We set off for Havre, I presume.'

"This is admirable, this is delightful! We shall have a capital journey. M. Malicorne, M. de Bragelonne — ah! M. de Wardes, let me present you." The young men saluted each other in a restrained manner. Their natures seemed, from the very beginning, disposed to

take exception to each other. De Wardes was pliant, subtle, and full of dissimulation ; Raoul was calm, grave, and upright. "Decide between us, — between De Wardes and myself, Raoul."

"Upon what subject?"

"Upon the subject of noble birth."

"Who can be better informed on that subject than a Grammont?"

"No compliments ; it is your opinion I ask."

"At least inform me of the subject under discussion."

"De Wardes asserts that the distribution of titles is abused; I, on the contrary, maintain that a title is useless as regards the man on whom it is bestowed."

"And you are correct," said Bragelonne, quietly.

"But, Monsieur the Viscount," interrupted De Wardes, with a kind of obstinacy, "I affirm that it is I who am correct."

"What was your opinion, Monsieur?"

"I was saying that everything possible is done in France at the present moment to humiliate men of family."

"And by whom?" asked Raoul.

"By the king himself. He surrounds himself with people who cannot show four quarterings."

"Nonsense!" said De Guiche ; "where could you possibly have seen that, De Wardes?"

"One example will suffice," he returned, directing his look fully upon Raoul.

"State it, then."

"Do you know who has just been nominated captain-general of the Musketeers, — an appointment more valuable than a peerage, for it gives precedence over all the marshals of France?"

Raoul's color mounted in his face; for he saw the

object De Wardes had in view. "No; who has been appointed? In any case it must have been very recently, for the appointment was vacant a week ago; a proof of which is that the king refused Monsieur, who solicited the post for one of his *protégés*."

"Well, the king refused it to Monsieur's *protégé* in order to bestow it upon the Chevalier d'Artagnan, a younger brother of some Gascon family, who has been trailing his sword in the antechambers during the last thirty years."

"Pardon me if I interrupt you, Monsieur," said Raoul, darting a stern glance at De Wardes; "but you give me the impression of being unacquainted with the gentleman of whom you are speaking."

"I unacquainted with M. d'Artagnan? Can you tell me, Monsieur, who does know him?"

"Those who do know him, Monsieur," replied Raoul, with still greater calmness and sternness of manner, "are in the habit of saying that if he is not as good a gentleman as the king, — which is not his fault, — he is the equal of all the kings of the earth in courage and loyalty. Such is my opinion, Monsieur; and I thank Heaven I have known M. d'Artagnan from my birth."

De Wardes was about to reply, when De Guiche interrupted him.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE PORTRAIT OF MADAME.

The discussion was becoming full of bitterness. De Guiche perfectly understood the whole matter; for there was in De Bragelonne's look something instinctively hostile, while in that of De Wardes there was something like a determination to offend. Without inquiring into the different feelings which actuated his two friends, De Guiche resolved to ward off the blow which he felt was on the point of being dealt by one or the other of them, and perhaps by both. "Gentlemen," he said, "we must take leave of one another; I must pay a visit to Monsieur. Let us fulfil our appointments. You, De Wardes, will accompany me to the Louvre, and you, Raoul, will remain here master of the house; and as all that is done here is under your advice, you will bestow the last glance upon my preparations for departure."

Raoul, with the air of one who neither seeks nor fears a quarrel, bowed his head in token of assent, and seated himself upon a bench in the sun. "That is well," said De Guiche; "remain where you are, Raoul, and tell them to show you the two horses I have just purchased. You will give me your opinion, for I only bought them on condition that you ratified the purchase. By the by, I have to beg your pardon for having omitted to inquire after the Comte de la Fère." While pronouncing these latter words, he closely observed De Wardes, in order to perceive what effect the name of Raoul's father would produce upon him.

"I thank you," answered the young man, "the count is very well."

A gleam of deep hatred passed into De Wardes' eyes. De Guiche, who appeared not to notice the ominous expression, went up to Raoul, and grasping him by the hand said, "It is agreed, then, Bragelonne, is it not, that you will rejoin us in the courtyard of the Palais-Royal?" He then signed to De Wardes, who had been engaged in balancing himself, first on one foot, then on the other, to follow him. "We are going," said he; "come, M. Malicorne."

That name made Raoul start; for it seemed to him that he had heard it pronounced before, but he could not remember on what occasion. While trying to do so, half dreamingly, yet half irritated at his conversation with De Wardes, the three young men went on their way towards the Palais-Royal, where Monsieur was residing. Malicorne learned two things, — the first, that the young men had something to say to each other; and the second, that he ought not to walk in the same line with them, and therefore he walked behind.

"Are you mad?" said De Guiche to his companion, as soon as they had left the Hôtel de Grammont; "you attack M. d'Artagnan, and that, too, before Raoul."

"Well," said De Wardes, "what then?"

"What do you mean by 'what then'?"

"Well, is there any prohibition against attacking M. d'Artagnan?"

"But you know very well that M. d'Artagnan was one of those celebrated and redoubtable four men who were called the Musketeers."

"That may be; but I do not perceive why that should prevent me from hating M. d'Artagnan."

"What cause has he given you?"

"Me? personally, none."

"Why hate him, then?"

"Ask my dead father that question."

"Really, my dear De Wardes, you surprise me. M. d'Artagnan is not one to leave unsettled any enmity he may have to arrange, without completely clearing his account. Your father, I have heard, on his side carried matters with a high hand. Moreover, there are no enmities so bitter that they may not be washed away by blood, by a good sword-thrust loyally given."

"Listen to me, my dear De Guiche. This inveterate dislike existed between my father and M. d'Artagnan; and when I was quite a child he acquainted me with the reason for it, and it is a particular legacy which he has left me as part of my inheritance."

"And does this hatred concern M. d'Artagnan alone?"

"As for that, M. d'Artagnan was so intimately associated with his three friends, that some portion of the full measure of my hatred for him must inevitably fall to their lot; and that hatred is of such a nature that whenever the opportunity occurs, they shall have no occasion to complain of their portion."

De Guiche had kept his eyes fixed on De Wardes, and shuddered at the bitter manner in which the young man smiled. Something like a presentiment flashed across his mind. He knew that the time had passed away for home thrusts between gentlemen, but that the feeling of hatred treasured up in the heart, instead of being diffused abroad, was none the less hatred; that a smile was sometimes as full of sinister meaning as a threat; and, in a word, that to the fathers who had hated with their hearts and fought with their strength, would now succeed the sons, who themselves also would indeed hate with their hearts, but would no longer encounter their

enemies save by the means of intrigue or treachery. As, therefore, it certainly was not Raoul whom he could suspect either of intrigue or of treachery, it was on Raoul's account that De Guiche trembled.

However, while these gloomy forebodings cast a shade of anxiety over De Guiche's countenance, De Wardes had resumed entire mastery over himself. "At all events," he observed, "I have no personal ill-will towards M. de Bragelonne; I do not even know him."

"In any case," said De Guiche, with a certain amount of sternness in his tone, "do not forget one circumstance, — that Raoul is my most intimate friend;" a remark at which De Wardes bowed.

The conversation terminated there, although De Guiche tried his utmost to draw out De Wardes' secret from him; but doubtless that young gentleman had determined to say nothing further, and he remained impenetrable. De Guiche therefore promised himself a more satisfactory result with Raoul.

In the mean time they had reached the Palais-Royal, which was surrounded by a crowd of lookers-on. Monsieur's household awaited his orders to mount their horses, and form part of the escort of the ambassadors to whom had been intrusted the care of bringing the young princess to Paris.

The brilliant display of horses, arms, and liveries afforded some compensation in those times, thanks to the kindly feelings of the people and to the traditions of deep devotion to their sovereigns, for the enormous expenses charged upon the taxes. Mazarin had said, "Let them sing, provided they pay;" while Louis XIV.'s remark was, "Let them look." Sight had replaced the voice; the people could still look, but they could no longer sing.

M. de Guiche left De Wardes and Malicorne at the foot

of the grand staircase, while he himself, who shared the favor of Monsieur with the Chevalier de Lorraine, who always smiled at him most affectionately though he could not endure him, went straight to the prince's apartments, and found him engaged in admiring himself in the glass and putting rouge on his face. In a corner of the room the Chevalier de Lorraine was extended full length upon some cushions, having just had his long blond hair curled, with which he was playing after the manner of a woman.

The prince turned round as the count entered, and perceiving who it was, said: "Ah! is that you, Guiche? Come here, and tell me the truth."

"You know, my Lord, it is one of my defects to speak the truth."

"Fancy, Guiche, how that wicked chevalier has annoyed me."

The chevalier shrugged his shoulders.

"Why, how is that?" inquired De Guiche. "That is not customary with Monsieur the Chevalier."

"Well, he pretends," continued the prince, "that Mademoiselle Henrietta is better looking as a woman than I am as a man."

"Do not forget, my Lord," said De Guiche, frowning slightly, "that you required me to speak the truth."

"Certainly," said the prince, almost trembling.

"Well, and I shall tell it you"

"Do not be in a hurry, Guiche!" exclaimed the prince; "you have plenty of time. Look at me attentively, and try to recollect Madame. Besides, here is her portrait; look at it;" and he held out to him a miniature of the finest possible execution.

De Guiche took it, and looked at it for a long time attentively. "Upon my honor, my Lord, this is indeed a most lovely face."

"But look at me, Count, look at me!" said the prince, endeavoring to direct upon himself the attention of the count, who was completely absorbed in contemplation of the portrait.

"It is wonderful," murmured De Guiche.

"Really, one would almost imagine you had never seen this little girl before."

"It is true, my Lord, I have seen her; but it was five years ago, and there is a great difference between a child of twelve years and a young girl of seventeen."

"Well, what is your opinion? Speak out!"

"My opinion is that the portrait must be flattering, my Lord."

"Of that," said the prince, triumphantly, "there can be no doubt; but let us suppose that it is not flattering, what would your opinion be?"

"My Lord, your Highness is exceedingly happy to have so charming a bride."

"Very well; that is your opinion of her, but now of me."

"My opinion, my Lord, is that you are far too handsome for a man."

The Chevalier de Lorraine burst out laughing. The prince understood how severe towards himself this opinion of the Comte de Guiche was, and he looked somewhat displeased, saying, "My friends are not over-indulgent."

De Guiche looked at the portrait again, and after a few seconds of contemplation, returned it with apparent unwillingness to Monsieur, saying, "Most decidedly, my Lord, I should rather prefer to look ten times at your Highness than to look at Madame once again."

Doubtless the chevalier detected some mystery in these words, which were incomprehensible to the prince, for he exclaimed, "Very well; get married yourself."

Monsieur continued rouging himself; and when he had

finished, looked at the portrait again, once more turned to admire himself in the glass, and smiled, and no doubt was satisfied with the comparison. "You are very kind to have come," he said to De Guiche; "I feared you would leave without coming to bid me adieu."

"Your Highness knows me too well to believe me capable of so great a disrespect."

"Besides, I suppose you have something to ask from me before leaving Paris?"

"Your Highness has indeed guessed correctly, for I have a request to make."

"Very good; what is it?"

The Chevalier de Lorraine immediately became all eyes and ears, for he regarded every favor conferred upon another as a robbery committed against himself. And as De Guiche hesitated, the prince said: "If it be money, nothing could be more fortunate, for I am tremendously rich; the superintendent of the finances has sent me fifty thousand pistoles."

"I thank your Highness; but it is not an affair of money."

"What is it, then? Tell me."

"The appointment of a maid of honor."

"*Tudieu!* Guiche, what a patron you have become!" said the prince, disdainfully; "you never speak of anything else now but young misses."

The Chevalier de Lorraine smiled, for he knew very well that nothing displeased the prince more than to show any interest in ladies. "My Lord," said the count, "it is not I who am directly interested in the person of whom I have just spoken; I am acting on behalf of one of my friends."

"Ah! that is different; what is the name of the young lady in whom your friend is interested?"

"Mademoiselle de la Baume le Blanc de la Vallière; she is already maid of honor to the dowager princess."

"Why, she is lame," said the Chevalier de Lorraine, stretching himself on his cushions.

"Lame," repeated the prince, "and Madame to have her constantly before her eyes? Most certainly not! It may be dangerous for her when in an interesting condition."

The Chevalier de Lorraine burst out laughing.

"Chevalier," said De Guiche, "your conduct is ungenerous; while I am soliciting a favor, you do me all the mischief you can."

"Forgive me, Count," said the Chevalier de Lorraine, somewhat uneasy at the tone in which the count had emphasized his words; "but I had no intention of doing so, and I begin to believe that I have mistaken one young lady for another."

"There is no doubt of it, Monsieur; and I do not hesitate to declare that such is the case."

"Do you attach much importance to it, Guiche?" inquired the prince.

"I do, my Lord."

"Well, you shall have it; but ask me for no more appointments, for there are none to give away."

"Ah!" exclaimed the chevalier, "midday already; that is the hour fixed for the departure."

"You dismiss me, Monsieur?" inquired De Guiche.

"Really, Count, you treat me very ill to-day," replied the chevalier, affectionately.

"For heaven's sake, Count, for heaven's sake, Chevalier," said Monsieur, "do not quarrel so! Do you not see how you are distressing me?"

"My signature?" said De Guiche.

"Take a blank appointment from that drawer, and give

it to me." De Guiche handed the prince the document indicated, and at the same time presented him with a pen already dipped in ink; whereupon the prince signed. "Here," he said, returning him the appointment; "but I give it on one condition."

"Name it."

"That you will make friends with the chevalier."

"Willingly," said De Guiche; and he held out his hand to the chevalier with an indifference amounting to contempt.

"Adieu, Count!" said the chevalier, without seeming in any way to have noticed his slight; "adieu, and bring us back a princess who will not chatter with her own portrait too much."

"Yes, set off and lose no time. By the by, who accompany you?"

"Bragelonne and De Wardes."

"Both excellent and fearless companions."

"Too fearless," said the chevalier; "endeavor to bring them both back, Count."

"Bad heart, bad heart!" murmured De Guiche; "he scents mischief everywhere, and before any one else;" and taking leave of the prince, he went out. As soon as he reached the vestibule, he waved in the air the paper which the prince had signed. Malicorne hurried forward, and received it trembling with delight. But after having received it, De Guiche observed that he still awaited something further.

"Patience, Monsieur!" he said to Malicorne; "the Chevalier de Lorraine was there, and I feared an utter failure if I asked too much at once. Wait until I return. Adieu!"

"Adieu, Monsieur the Count; a thousand thanks!" said Malicorne.

"Send Manicamp to me. By the way, Monsieur, is it true that Mademoiselle de la Vallière is lame?"

As De Guiche said this, a horse drew up behind him; and on turning round he noticed that Bragelonne, who had just at that moment entered the courtyard, turned suddenly pale. The poor lover had heard the remark, which however was not the case with Malicorne, for he was already beyond the reach of the count's voice.

"Why is Louise's name spoken here?" Raoul asked himself; "oh! let not De Wardes, who stands smiling yonder, even say a word about her in my presence."

"Now, gentlemen," exclaimed the Comte de Guiche, "forward!"

At this moment the prince, who had completed his toilet, appeared at the window, and was immediately saluted by the acclamations of the whole escort; and ten minutes afterwards, banners, scarfs, and plumes were fluttering and waving in the air, as the cavalcade galloped away.

CHAPTER XXXV.

AT HAVRE.

This brilliant and gay company, animated with such varied feelings, arrived at Havre four days after their departure from Paris. It was about five o'clock in the afternoon, and no intelligence had yet been received of Madame. They were soon engaged in quest of apartments; but the greatest confusion immediately ensued among the masters, and violent quarrels among their attendants. In the midst of all this disorder the Comte de Guiche fancied that he recognized Manicamp. It was, indeed, Manicamp himself; but as Malicorne had taken possession of his very best costume, he had not been able to get any other than a suit of violet velvet trimmed with silver. De Guiche recognized him as much by his dress as by his features, for he had very frequently seen Manicamp in this violet suit, which was his last resource. Manicamp presented himself to the count under an arch of torches, which set fire to rather than illuminated the gate by which Havre is entered, and which is situated close to the tower of Francis I. The count, remarking the woe-begone expression of Manicamp's face, could not resist laughing. "Well, my poor Manicamp," he exclaimed, "how violet you look! Are you in mourning?"

"Yes," replied Manicamp, "I am in mourning."

"For whom, or for what?"

"For my blue and gold suit, which has disappeared, and in the place of which I could find nothing but this;

and I was even obliged to economize, in order to get possession of it."

"Indeed?"

"It is singular you should be astonished at that, since you leave me without any money."

"At all events, here you are, and that is the principal thing."

"By the most horrible roads."

"Where are you lodging?"

"Lodging?"

"Yes."

"I am not lodging anywhere."

De Guiche began to laugh. "Well, where do you intend to lodge?"

"Where you lodge."

"But I don't know where *that* is."

"What do you mean by saying you don't know?"

"Why, how is it likely I should know where I am to stay?"

"Have you not secured a hotel?"

"I?"

"Yes, you or the prince."

"Neither of us has thought of it. Havre is of considerable size, I suppose; and provided I can get a stable for a dozen horses, and a suitable house in a good quarter —"

"Oh, there are some very excellent houses."

"Well, then —"

"But not for us."

"What do you mean by saying not for us? — for whom, then?"

"For the English, of course."

"For the English?"

"Yes; the houses are all taken."

"By whom?"

"By the Duke of Buckingham."

"I beg your pardon!" said De Guiche, whose attention this name had awakened.

"Yes, my friend, by the Duke of Buckingham. His Grace has been preceded by a courier, who arrived here three days ago, and immediately secured all the houses fit for habitation which the town possesses."

"Come, come, Manicamp, let us understand each other."

"Well, what I have told you is clear enough, it seems to me."

"But surely Buckingham does not occupy the whole of Havre?"

"He certainly does not occupy it, since he has not yet landed; but when once landed, he will occupy it."

"Oh! oh!"

"It is quite clear you are not acquainted with the English; they have a perfect rage for monopolizing everything."

"That may be; but a man who has the whole of one house contents himself with that, and does not require two."

"Yes; but two men?"

"Be it so; for two men two houses, or four, or six, or ten, if you like; but there are a hundred houses at Havre."

"Yes, and all the hundred are let."

"Impossible!"

"What an obstinate fellow you are! I tell you Buckingham has hired all the houses surrounding the one which her Majesty the Queen-dowager of England and the princess her daughter will inhabit."

"Well, now, he is an extraordinary man," said De Wardes, caressing his horse's neck.

"Such is the case, however, Monsieur."

"You are quite sure of it, M. de Manicamp?" and as

he put this question he looked slyly at De Guiche, as though to sound him upon the degree of confidence to be placed in his friend's state of mind.

Meanwhile the night had closed in, and the torches, pages, attendants, squires, horses, and carriages blocked up the gate and the square; the torches were reflected in the channel, which the rising tide was gradually filling, while on the other side of the jetty might be perceived groups of curious lookers-on, consisting of sailors and townspeople, who seemed anxious to miss nothing of the spectacle.

Amid all this hesitation, Bragelonne, as though a perfect stranger to the scene, remained on his horse somewhat in the rear of De Guiche, and watched the rays of light reflected in the water, inhaling with delight the sea-breezes, and listening to the waves which broke noisily upon the pebbles and the sea-weed of the strand, dashing the spray into the air with a roar which echoed in the distance.

"But really," exclaimed De Guiche, "what could have been Buckingham's motive for securing such a supply of lodgings?"

"Yes," demanded De Wardes; "what reason has he?"

"A very excellent one," replied Manicamp.

"You know what it is, then?"

"I fancy I do."

"Tell us, then."

"Bend your head down towards me."

"What! can it not be said except in secrecy?"

"You shall judge of that yourself."

"Very well." De Guiche bent down.

"Love," said Manicamp.

"I do not understand you at all."

"Say, rather, you cannot understand me *yet*."

"Explain yourself."

"Very well! it is quite certain, Monsieur the Count, that his royal Highness will be the most unfortunate of husbands."

"What do you mean? The Duke of Buckingham —"

"That name brings ill omen to princes of the house of France."

"And so the duke —"

"Is madly in love with the young Madame, so the rumor runs, and will have no one approach her but himself."

De Guiche colored. "Thank you, thank you," said he to Manicamp, grasping his hand. Then, recovering himself, he added, "For heaven's sake, Manicamp, be careful that this design of Buckingham's does not reach the ears of any Frenchman here; for if so, the sun of this country will shine on swords which do not fear English steel."

"After all," said Manicamp, "I have had no satisfactory proof given me of the love in question, and it may be no more than an idle tale."

"No, no," said De Guiche, "it must be the truth;" and despite his command over himself, he clenched his teeth.

"Well," said Manicamp, "after all, what does it matter to you? What does it matter to me whether the prince is to be what the late king was? Buckingham the father for the queen, Buckingham the son for the young princess."

"Manicamp! Manicamp!"

"It is a fact; or, at least, everybody says so."

"Silence!" said the count.

"But why silence?" said De Wardes; "it is a highly creditable circumstance for the French nation. Are not you of my opinion, M. de Bragelonne?"

"To what circumstance do you allude?" inquired Bragelonne, with an abstracted air.

"That the English should render homage to the beauty of our queens and our princesses."

"Pardon me, but I have not been paying attention to what has passed; will you oblige me by explaining?"

"There is no doubt it was necessary that Buckingham the father should come to Paris, in order that his Majesty King Louis XIII. should perceive that his wife was one of the most beautiful women of the French Court; and it seems necessary, at the present time, that Buckingham the son should consecrate, in his turn, by the devotion of his worship, the beauty of a princess who has French blood in her veins. It will henceforth confer a title of beauty to have inspired love across the sea."

"Monsieur," replied Bragelonne, "I do not like to hear such matters treated so lightly. Gentlemen as we are, we should be careful guardians of the honor of our queens and our princesses. If we jest at them, what will our servants do?"

"Ah, Monsieur," said De Wardes, whose ears tingled at the remark, "how am I to understand that?"

"In any way you choose, Monsieur," replied Bragelonne, coldly.

"Bragelonne, Bragelonne!" murmured De Guiche.

"M. de Wardes!" exclaimed Manicamp, noticing that the young man had spurred his horse close to the side of Raoul.

"Messieurs, Messieurs," said De Guiche, "do not set such an example in public, in the street too. De Wardes, you are wrong."

"Wrong! in what way, may I ask you?"

"You are wrong, Monsieur, because you are always speaking ill of some one or something" replied Raoul, with undisturbed composure.

"Be indulgent, Raoul!" said De Guiche, in an undertone.

"Pray do not think of fighting," said Manicamp, "before you have rested yourselves; for in that case you will not be able to do much."

"Come, come," said De Guiche, "forward, Messieurs!" and breaking through the horses and attendants, he cleared the way for himself through the crowd towards the centre of the square, followed by the whole cavalcade. A large gateway leading to a courtyard was open. De Guiche entered this courtyard; and Bragelonne, De Wardes, Manicamp, and three or four other gentlemen followed him. A sort of council of war was held, and the means to be employed for saving the dignity of the embassy were deliberated upon. Bragelonne was of opinion that the right of priority should be respected, while De Wardes suggested that the town should be sacked. This latter proposition appeared to Manicamp somewhat rash, he proposing instead that they should sleep on the matter. This was the wisest thing to do; but, unhappily, to follow his advice, two things only were wanting, — namely, a house and beds.

De Guiche considered for a while, and then said aloud, "Let him who loves me, follow me!"

"The attendants also?" inquired a page who had approached the group.

"Every one!" exclaimed the impetuous young man. "Manicamp, show us the way to the house destined for her royal Highness's residence."

Without in any way divining the count's project, his friends followed him, accompanied by a crowd of people, whose acclamations and delight seemed a happy omen for the success of the still uncomprehended project which these ardent young men were pursuing. The wind was blowing stiffly from the harbor, and moaning in fitful gusts.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

AT SEA.

The following day was somewhat more calm, although the wind still continued to blow. The sun had, however, risen through a bank of reddened clouds, tingeing with its crimson rays the crests of the black waves. Watch was impatiently kept from the different look-outs. Towards eleven o'clock in the morning a ship, with sails full set, was signalled; two others followed at the distance of about half a knot. They approached like arrows shot from the bow of a sturdy archer; and yet the sea ran so high that their speed took nothing from the rolling of the billows in which the vessels were plunging first in one direction and then in another. The English fleet was soon recognized by the lines of the ships and by the color of their pennants; the one which had the princess on board and carried the admiral's flag preceded the others.

The rumor now spread that the princess was arriving. The entire French Court ran to the harbor, while the quays and jetties were soon covered with crowds of people. Two hours afterward, the other vessels had overtaken the flag-ship; and the three, not venturing perhaps to enter the narrow entrance of the harbor, cast anchor between Havre and La Hève. When this manœuvre had been accomplished, the vessel which bore the admiral saluted France with twelve discharges of cannon, which were returned, shot for shot, from Fort Francis I. Immediately afterward a hundred boats were

launched; they were draped with the richest fabrics, and were destined for the conveyance of the French nobility to the vessels at anchor. But when it was observed that even inside the harbor the boats were tossed to and fro, and that beyond the jetty the waves rose mountains high, dashing upon the strand with a terrible uproar, it was easily seen that not one of those frail boats would be able to make a fourth part of the distance between the shore and the vessels at anchor without being swamped. A pilot-boat, however, notwithstanding the wind and the sea, was getting ready to leave the harbor to place itself at the disposal of the English admiral.

De Guiche, who had been looking among the different boats for one stronger than the others, which might offer a chance of reaching the English vessels, perceiving the pilot-boat getting ready to start, said to Raoul: "Do you not think, Raoul, that intelligent and vigorous men like us ought to be ashamed to retreat before the brute force of wind and waves?"

"That is precisely the reflection I was silently making to myself," replied Bragelonne.

"Shall we get into that boat, then, and push off? Will you come, De Wardes?"

"Take care, or you will get drowned," said Manicamp.

"And for no purpose," said De Wardes; "for with the wind dead against you, as it will be, you will never reach the vessels."

"You decline, then?"

"Assuredly I do. I would willingly risk and lose my life in an encounter with men," he said, glancing at Bragelonne; "but as to fighting with oars against waves, I have no taste for that."

"And for myself," said Manicamp, "even were I to succeed in reaching the ships, I should not be indifferent

to the loss of the only good dress which I have left, — since salt water would splash and spoil it."

"You, then, decline also?" exclaimed De Guiche.

"Decidedly I do; I beg you to understand that most distinctly."

"But," exclaimed De Guiche, "look, De Wardes, — look, Manicamp, look! Yonder the princesses are gazing at us from the poop of the admiral's vessel."

"An additional reason, my dear fellow, why we should not make ourselves ridiculous by taking a bath while they are looking on."

"Is that your last word, Manicamp?"

"Yes."

"And yours, De Wardes?"

"Yes."

"Then I will go alone."

"Not so," said Raoul, "for I shall accompany you; I thought that was understood."

The fact is, that while Raoul, unimpassioned, had coolly measured the risk to be run, and had seen how imminent the danger was, he was yet willing to accept a peril from which De Wardes had recoiled.

The boat was about to set off when De Guiche called to the pilot. "Holloa, the boat!" said he; "we want two places;" and wrapping five or six pistoles in paper he threw them from the quay into the boat.

"It seems you are not afraid of salt water, young gentlemen," said the skipper.

"We are afraid of nothing," answered De Guiche.

"Come along, then!"

The pilot came alongside; and the two young men, one after the other, with equal agility jumped into the boat. "Courage, my men!" said De Guiche. "There are twenty pistoles left in this purse; and as soon as we reach the

admiral's vessel they are yours." The sailors bent themselves to their oars, and the boat bounded over the crest of the waves.

The interest taken in this hazardous expedition was universal; the whole population of Havre crowded on the jetties, and every look was directed towards the boat. At one moment the frail craft remained suspended upon the crest of the foaming waves, then suddenly glided downward towards the bottom of a roaring abyss, where it seemed utterly lost. Nevertheless, at the end of an hour's struggling with the waves, it reached the spot where the admiral's vessel was anchored, and from the side of which two boats had already been despatched to their aid.

Upon the quarter-deck of the flag-ship, sheltered by a canopy of velvet and ermine, which was suspended by stout supports, Madame Henrietta, the queen-dowager, and the young princess — with the admiral, the Duke of Norfolk, standing beside them — watched with alarm this slender boat, at one moment carried to the heavens, and the next buried beneath the waves, against whose dark sail the noble figures of the two French gentlemen stood forth in relief like two luminous apparitions. The crew, leaning against the bulwarks and clinging to the shrouds, cheered the courage of the two daring young men, the skill of the pilot, and the strength of the sailors. They were received at the side of the vessel with a shout of triumph. The Duke of Norfolk, a handsome young man, from twenty-six to twenty-eight years of age, advanced to meet them. De Guiche and Bragelonne lightly mounted the ladder on the starboard side, and, conducted by the Duke of Norfolk, approached to offer their homage to the princesses. Respect, and yet more a certain apprehension for which he could not account, had hitherto restrained the Comte de Guiche from look-

ing at the young princess attentively, who however had observed him immediately, and had asked her mother, "Is not that Monsieur in the boat yonder?" Madame Henrietta, who knew Monsieur better than her daughter did, had smiled at the mistake her vanity had led her into, and had answered, "No; it is only M. de Guiche, his favorite." The princess, at this reply, had been obliged to check an instinctive tenderness of feeling which the courage displayed by the count had awakened.

At the very moment the princess had put this question to her mother, De Guiche had at last summoned courage to raise his eyes to her, and could compare the original with the portrait he had so lately seen. No sooner had he remarked her fair face, her eyes so full of animation, her beautiful brown hair, her expressive lips, and that gesture, so eminently royal, which seemed to thank and to encourage him at one and the same time, than he was for a moment so overcome with emotion that had it not been for Raoul, on whose arm he leaned, he would have tottered. His friend's amazed look and the encouraging gesture of the queen restored De Guiche to his self-possession. In a few words he explained his mission, told how he had become the envoy of his royal Highness, and saluted, according to their rank and the reception they gave him, the admiral and the different English noblemen who were grouped around the princesses.

Raoul was then presented, and was most graciously received. The part that the Comte de la Fère had taken in the restoration of King Charles II. was known to all; and, more than that, it was the count who had been charged with the negotiation of the marriage by reason of which the granddaughter of Henry IV. was now returning to France. Raoul spoke English perfectly, and constituted himself his friend's interpreter with the young

English noblemen, who were indifferently acquainted with the French language.

At this moment a young man came forward, of extremely handsome features, whose dress and arms were remarkable for their rich magnificence. He approached the princesses, who were engaged in conversation with the Duke of Norfolk, and in a voice which ill concealed his impatience, said, "My ladies, it is now time to go ashore."

The young princess rose from her seat at this invitation, and was about to take the hand which the young nobleman had extended to her with an eagerness which arose from a variety of motives, when the admiral advanced between them, observing: "A moment, if you please, my Lord Buckingham. It is not possible for ladies to disembark just now, the sea is too rough; but it is probable the wind may abate towards four o'clock, and the landing will not be effected, therefore, until this evening."

"Allow me, my Lord," said Buckingham, with an irritation of manner which he did not seek to disguise. "You detain these ladies, and you have no right to do so. One of them, alas! now belongs to France, and you perceive that France claims them by the voice of her ambassadors;" and at the same moment he indicated Raoul and De Guiche, whom he saluted.

"I cannot suppose that it enters into the intentions of these gentlemen to expose the lives of the princesses," replied the admiral.

"My Lord, these gentlemen arrived here safely, notwithstanding the wind; allow me to believe that the danger will not be greater for these ladies when the wind will be in their favor."

"These gentlemen are very courageous," said the admiral. "You may have observed that there was on shore

a great number of persons who did not venture to accompany them. Moreover, the desire which they had to pay their homage with the least possible delay to Madame and her illustrious mother induced them to brave the sea, which is very tempestuous to-day, even for sailors. These gentlemen, however, whom I recommend as an example for my officers to follow, can hardly be so for these ladies."

Madame glanced at the Comte de Guiche, and perceived that his face was burning with confusion. This look had escaped Buckingham, who had eyes for nothing but watching Norfolk, of whom he was evidently very jealous, and seemed anxious to remove the princesses from the deck of a vessel where the admiral reigned supreme.

"In that case," returned Buckingham, "I appeal to Madame herself."

"And I, my Lord," retorted the admiral, "appeal to my own conscience, and to my own sense of responsibility. I have undertaken to convey Madame safe and sound to France, and I shall keep my promise."

"Yet, sir —" continued Buckingham.

"My Lord, permit me to remind you that I alone command here."

"Are you aware what you are saying, my Lord?" replied Buckingham, haughtily.

"Perfectly so, and I repeat it. I alone command here: all yield obedience to me; the sea and the winds, the ships and men too."

This remark was made in a dignified and authoritative manner. Raoul observed its effect upon Buckingham, who trembled from head to foot, and leaned against one of the poles of the canopy to prevent himself from falling; his eyes became bloodshot, and the hand which he did not need for his support wandered towards the hilt of his sword.

"My Lord," said the queen, "permit me to observe that I agree in every particular with the advice of the Duke of Norfolk; even if the heavens, instead of being clouded as they are at the present moment, were perfectly serene and propitious, we could afford to bestow a few hours upon the officer who has conducted us so successfully, and with such extreme attention, to the French coast, where he is to take leave of us."

Buckingham, instead of replying, seemed to seek counsel from the expression of Madame's face. She, however, half concealed beneath the curtains of velvet and gold which sheltered her, had not listened to the dispute, having been occupied in watching the Comte de Guiche, who was conversing with Raoul. This was a fresh blow for Buckingham, who fancied he perceived in Madame Henrietta's look a deeper feeling than that of curiosity. He withdrew, almost tottering in his gait, and nearly stumbled against the mainmast.

"The duke has not acquired a steady footing yet," said the queen-mother, in French; "and that is doubtless his reason for wishing to find himself on firm land again."

The young man, overhearing this remark, turned suddenly pale, and letting his hands fall in great discouragement by his side, retired, mingling in one sigh his old affection and his new hatreds. The admiral, however, without taking any further notice of Buckingham's ill-humor, led the princesses into the quarter-deck cabin, where dinner was served with a magnificence worthy in every respect of his guests. The admiral seated himself at the right hand of the princess, and placed the Comte de Guiche on her left. This was the place Buckingham usually occupied; and when he entered the cabin, how profound was his unhappiness at seeing himself banished by etiquette from the presence of the lady to whom he

owed respect, to a position inferior to that which by his rank he was entitled to occupy. De Guiche, on the other hand, paler still perhaps from happiness than his rival was from anger, seated himself tremblingly next the princess, whose silken robe, as it lightly touched him, caused a tremor of inconceivable happiness to pass through his whole frame.

The repast finished, Buckingham darted forward to hand Madame Henrietta from the table; but this time it was De Guiche's turn to give the duke a lesson. "Have the goodness, my Lord," said he, "from this moment not to interpose between her royal Highness and myself. From this moment, indeed, her royal Highness belongs to France; and when her royal Highness honors me by touching my hand, it is the hand of his royal Highness Monsieur, the brother of the King of France, that she touches."

And saying this, he presented his hand to Madame Henrietta with such marked timidity, and at the same time with a nobleness of mien so intrepid, that a murmur of admiration rose from the English, while a groan of despair escaped from Buckingham's lips.

Raoul, who loved, comprehended it all. He fixed upon his friend one of those profound looks which a friend or a mother can alone extend, either as a protector or a guardian, over the child or the friend about to stray from the right path.

About two o'clock in the afternoon the sun shone forth, the wind subsided, the sea became smooth as a crystal mirror, and the fog which had shrouded the coast disappeared like a veil withdrawn from before it. The smiling hills of France then appeared to the view, with their numerous white houses rendered more conspicuous by the bright green of the trees or the clear blue sky.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE TENTS.

The admiral, as has been seen, had determined to pay no further attention to Buckingham's threatening glances and fits of passion. In fact, from the moment they left England he had gradually and quietly accustomed himself to it. De Guiche had not yet in any way remarked the animosity which appeared to influence that young nobleman against him, but he felt instinctively that there could be no sympathy between himself and the favorite of Charles II. The queen-mother, with greater experience and calmer judgment, perceived the exact position of affairs, and as she discerned its danger was prepared to meet it whenever the proper moment should arrive. That moment came. Quiet had been everywhere restored, except in Buckingham's heart, and he in his impatience addressed himself to the princess in a low voice: "For heaven's sake, Madame, I implore you to hasten your disembarkation. Do you not perceive how that foppish Duke of Norfolk is killing me with his attentions and devotions to you?"

Henrietta heard this remark. She smiled, and without turning her head towards him, but giving only to the tone of her voice that inflection of gentle reproach and languid impertinence with which coquetry so well knows how to give compliance while yet seeming to utter a prohibition, she murmured, "I have already told you, my Lord, that you must have taken leave of your senses."

Not a single detail, we have already said, escaped Raoul's attention: he had heard both Buckingham's entreaty and the princess's reply; he had observed Buckingham draw back, had heard his deep sigh, and saw him pass his hand across his face. He understood everything, and trembled as he reflected on the position of affairs, and the state of the minds of those about him. At last the admiral, with studied delay, gave the final directions for the departure of the boats. Buckingham heard the directions given with such an exhibition of delight that a stranger would almost have imagined the young man's reason was affected. At the command of the Duke of Norfolk, a large boat or barge, decked with flags and capable of holding twenty rowers and fifteen passengers, was slowly lowered from the side of the admiral's vessel. This truly royal barge was carpeted with velvet, and decorated with coverings embroidered with the arms of England and with garlands of flowers; for at that time the language of allegory was freely employed even on the occasion of a political alliance.

No sooner was the barge afloat — the rowers, with oars uplifted, awaiting, like soldiers presenting arms, the embarkation of the princess — than Buckingham ran forward to the ladder to take his place in it. But the queen stopped him. "My Lord," she said, "it is hardly becoming that you should allow my daughter and myself to land, without having previously ascertained that our apartments are properly prepared. I beg your Lordship to be good enough therefore to precede us to Havre, and to make sure that everything is in proper order on our arrival."

This was a fresh disappointment for the duke, and still more so since it was so unexpected. He stammered, colored violently, but could not reply. He had thought

he might be able to keep near the princess during the passage to the shore, and by this means to enjoy to the very last moment the brief period which fortune still reserved for him. The order, however, was explicit; and the admiral, who heard it given, immediately called out, "Launch the ship's gig!" The order was executed with that celerity which distinguishes every manœuvre on board a man-of-war.

Buckingham, in utter hopelessness, cast a look of despair at the princess, of supplication towards the queen, and directed a glance full of anger towards the admiral. The princess pretended not to notice him, while the queen turned aside her head, and the admiral laughed outright, at the sound of which Buckingham seemed ready to spring upon him.

The queen-mother rose, and, with a tone of authority, said, "Pray, set off, sir!"

The young duke hesitated, looked around him, and with a last effort, half choked by contending emotions, said, "And you, Messieurs, M. de Guiche and M. de Bragelonne, do not you accompany me?"

De Guiche bowed and said, "Both M. de Bragelonne and myself await her Majesty's orders; whatever may be the commands she imposes on us, we shall obey them." Saying this, he looked towards the princess, who cast down her eyes.

"Your Grace will remember," said the queen, "that M. de Guiche is here to represent Monsieur; it is he who will do the honors of France, as you have done those of England. His presence, then, cannot be dispensed with; besides, we owe him this slight favor for the courage he displayed in venturing to seek us in such terrible weather."

Buckingham opened his lips as if about to speak; but whether thoughts or expressions failed him, not a syllable

escaped them; and turning away, as though he were out of his mind, he leaped from the vessel into the boat. The sailors were just in time to catch hold of him and to steady themselves, for his weight and the rebound had almost upset the boat.

"Surely my Lord is mad," said the admiral aloud to Raoul.

"I am uneasy on my Lord's account," replied Bragelonne.

While the boat was moving towards the shore, the duke kept his eyes immovably fixed upon the admiral's ship, like a miser torn away from his coffers, or like a mother separated from her child, about to be led away to death. No one, however, acknowledged his signals, his gesticulations, or his pitiful gestures. In very anguish of mind he sank down on a seat, burying his hands in his hair; while the boat, impelled by the exertions of the heedless sailors, flew over the waves. On his arrival he was in such a state of apathy that had he not been received at the harbor by the messenger whom he had directed to precede him as quartermaster, he would hardly have been able to ask his way. Having once, however, reached the house which had been set apart for him, he shut himself up like Achilles in his tent.

The barge bearing the princesses quitted the admiral's vessel at the very moment Buckingham had landed. It was followed by another boat, filled with officers, courtiers, and zealous friends. The whole population of Havre, having hastily embarked in fishing-boats or flat-boats or long Norman pinnaces, set off to meet the royal barge. The cannon from the forts fired salutes, which were returned by the flag-ship and the two other vessels, and the clouds of flame from the belching mouths of the cannon floated in white vapor over the waves, and then disappeared in the azure of the sky.

The princess landed at the steps of the quay. Bands of gay music greeted her arrival, and accompanied every step she took. While she was passing through the centre of the town, and treading beneath her dainty feet the richest carpets and the gayest flowers which had been strewn upon the ground, De Guiche and Raoul, escaping from their English friends, hastened rapidly through the town and towards the place intended for the residence of the princess.

"Let us hurry forward," said Raoul to De Guiche; "for if I read Buckingham's character aright, he will create some disturbance when he learns the result of our deliberations of yesterday."

"Never fear!" said the count. "De Wardes is there, who is determination itself; while Manicamp is the very personification of gentleness."

De Guiche was not, however, the less diligent on that account, and five minutes afterward they were in sight of the Hôtel de Ville. The first thing which struck them was the number of persons assembled in front of the square. "Good!" said De Guiche; "our apartments, I see, are prepared."

In fact, in front of the Hôtel de Ville, upon the wide open space before it, eight of the most gorgeous tents had been raised, surmounted by the flags of France and England united. The hotel was surrounded by tents, as by a girdle of variegated colors; ten pages and a dozen mounted troopers, who had been given to the ambassadors for an escort, mounted guard before the tents. It had a singularly curious effect, almost fairy-like in its appearance. These improvised tents had been constructed during the night-time. Fitted up, within and without, with the richest materials that De Guiche had been able to procure in Havre, they completely encircled the Hôtel

de Ville, — that is to say, the abode of the princess. They were joined one to another by silken ropes, guarded by sentinels; so that Buckingham's plans were completely subverted, if those plans had really been to reserve for himself and his Englishmen the approaches to the Hôtel de Ville. The only passage which gave access to the steps of the hotel, and which was not closed by this silken barricade, was guarded by two tents, resembling two pavilions, the doorways of both of which opened on this entrance. These two tents were destined for De Guiche and Raoul; in whose absence they were always to be occupied, that of De Guiche by De Wardes, and that of Raoul by Manicamp. Around these two tents, and the six others, a hundred officers, gentlemen, and pages, dazzling in their display of silk and gold, thronged like bees around a hive. Every one of them, their swords by their sides, was ready to obey the slightest sign either of De Guiche or Bragelonne, the leaders of the embassy.

At the very moment when the two young men appeared at the end of one of the streets leading to the square, they perceived crossing the square, at full gallop, a young man on horseback, whose costume was of surprising richness. He pushed hastily through the crowd of curious lookers-on, and at the sight of these unexpected erections uttered a cry of anger and dismay. It was Buckingham, who had awakened from his stupor, in order to adorn himself with a resplendent costume, and to await the arrival of the princess and the queen-mother at the Hôtel de Ville. At the entrance to the tents the soldier barred his passage, and his further progress was arrested. Buckingham, completely infuriated, raised his whip; but his arm was seized by two of the officers. Of the two guardians of the tent, only one was there. De Wardes was inside the Hôtel de Ville,

engaged in attending to the execution of some orders given by De Guiche. At the noise made by Buckingham, Manicamp, who was indolently reclining upon the cushions at the doorway of one of the two tents, rose with his usual indifference, and perceiving that the disturbance continued, made his appearance from underneath the curtains. "What is the matter," he said, in a gentle tone of voice, "and who is it making this disturbance?"

It so happened that at the moment he began to speak silence had just been restored, and although his voice was very soft and gentle in its tone, every one heard his question. Buckingham turned round, and looked at the tall, thin figure and the listless countenance of his questioner. Probably the personal appearance of Manicamp, who was moreover dressed very plainly as we have said, did not inspire him with much respect, for he replied disdainfully, "Who may you be, Monsieur?"

Manicamp, leaning on the arm of a gigantic trooper, as firm as the pillar of a cathedral, replied in the same tranquil tone, "And you, Monsieur?"

"I am his Grace the Duke of Buckingham. I have hired all the houses which surround the Hôtel de Ville, where my business is; and as these houses are let, they belong to me; and as I hired them in order to preserve the right of free access to the Hôtel de Ville, you have no right to prevent my passage."

"But who prevents you from passing, Monsieur?" inquired Manicamp.

"Your sentinels."

"Because you wish to pass on horseback, Monsieur, and orders have been given to let only persons pass on foot."

"No one has any right to give orders here, except myself," said Buckingham.

"How so, Monsieur?" inquired Manicamp, with his soft voice; "will you do me the favor to explain this enigma to me?"

"Because, as I have told you, I have hired all the houses looking on the square."

"We are very well aware of that, since nothing but the square itself has been left for us."

"You are mistaken, Monsieur; the square belongs to me, as well as the houses in it."

"Pardon me, Monsieur, but you are mistaken there. In our country, we say, The highway belongs to the king; therefore this square is his Majesty's; and consequently, as we are the king's ambassadors, the square belongs to us."

"I have already asked you who you are, Monsieur," exclaimed Buckingham, exasperated at the coolness of his interlocutor.

"My name is Manicamp," replied the young man, in a voice whose tones were as harmonious and sweet as the notes of an Æolian harp.

Buckingham shrugged his shoulders contemptuously, and said, "When I hired these houses which surround the Hôtel de Ville, the square was unoccupied. These barracks obstruct my sight; let them be removed!"

A hoarse and angry murmur passed through the crowd of listeners at these words. De Guiche arrived at this moment; he pushed through the crowd which separated him from Buckingham, and followed by Raoul arrived on the scene of action from one side, just as De Wardes arrived from the other. "Pardon me, my Lord," said he; "but if you have any complaint to make, have the goodness to address it to me, inasmuch as it was I who supplied the plans for the construction of these tents."

"Moreover, I would beg you to observe, Monsieur,

that the term 'barrack' is objected to," added Manicamp, graciously.

"You were saying, Monsieur —" continued De Guiche.

"I was saying, Monsieur the Count," resumed Buckingham, in a tone of anger still perceptible, although in some measure moderated by the presence of an equal, "I was saying that it is impossible for these tents to remain where they are."

"Impossible!" exclaimed De Guiche, "and for what reason?"

"Because they annoy me."

A movement of impatience escaped De Guiche, but a warning glance from Raoul restrained him.

"You should the less object to them, Monsieur, on account of the abuse of priority you have permitted yourself to exercise."

"Abuse!"

"Most assuredly. You commission a messenger, who hires in your name the whole of the town of Havre, without considering the members of the French Court who would be sure to arrive here to meet Madame. Your Grace will admit that this is hardly friendly conduct in the representative of a friendly nation."

"The right of possession belongs to him who is first on the spot."

"Not in France, Monsieur."

"Why not in France?"

"Because France is a country where politeness is observed."

"Which means —" exclaimed Buckingham, in so violent a manner that those who were present drew back, expecting an immediate collision.

"Which means, Monsieur," answered De Guiche, turning pale, "that I have caused these tents to be raised as

habitations for myself and my friends, as a shelter for the ambasssadors of France, as the only place of refuge which your unreasonableness has left us in the town; and that I and those who are with me shall remain in them, at least until a force more powerful and more authoritative than your own shall dismiss me from them."

"In other words, until we are overruled, as the lawyers say," observed Manicamp, blandly.

"I know an authority, Monsieur, which I trust will be such as you wish for," said Buckingham, placing his hand on the hilt of his sword.

At this moment, and as the goddess of Discord, inflaming the minds of all, was about to direct their swords against one another, Raoul gently placed his hand on Buckingham's shoulder. "One word, my Lord!" he said.

"My right, my right, first of all!" exclaimed the fiery young man.

"It is precisely upon that point I wish to have the honor of addressing a word to you," said Raoul.

"Very well, Monsieur, but let your remarks be brief."

"One question is all I would ask; you can hardly expect me to be briefer."

"Speak! I am listening."

"Are you, or is the Duke of Orleans, going to marry the granddaughter of Henry IV.?"

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Buckingham, retreating a few steps, quite bewildered.

"Have the goodness to answer me," persisted Raoul, calmly.

"Do you mean to ridicule me, Monsieur?" demanded Buckingham.

"Your question is a sufficient answer for me. You admit, then, that it is not you who are going to marry the princess."

"You know it perfectly well, Monsieur, I should imagine."

"I beg your pardon, but your conduct has been such as to leave it not altogether certain."

"Proceed, Monsieur; what do you mean to intimate?"

Raoul approached the duke. "Are you aware, my Lord," he said, lowering his voice, "that your extravagances very much resemble the excesses of jealousy? These jealous fits with respect to any woman are not becoming in one who is neither her lover nor her husband; and I am sure you will admit that my remark applies with still greater force when the lady in question is a princess of royal blood."

"Monsieur," exclaimed Buckingham, "do you mean to insult Madame Henrietta?"

"Be careful, my Lord," replied Bragelonne, coldly, "for it is you who insult her. A little while since, when on board the admiral's ship, you annoyed the queen, and exhausted the admiral's patience. I was observing you, my Lord; and at first I concluded you were not in possession of your senses, but I have since surmised the real character of your madness."

"Monsieur!" exclaimed Buckingham.

"One moment more, for I have yet another word to add. I trust I am the only one of my companions who has guessed it."

"Are you aware, Monsieur," said Buckingham, trembling with mingled feelings of anger and uneasiness, — "are you aware that you are using language towards me which requires to be checked?"

"Weigh your words well, my Lord!" said Raoul, haughtily. "My nature is not such that its outbursts need checking; while you, on the contrary, are descended from a race whose passions are suspected by all true

Frenchmen. I repeat, therefore, for the second time, be careful!"

"Careful of what, may I ask? Do you presume to threaten me?"

"I am the son of the Comte de la Fère, my Lord Buckingham, and I never threaten, because I strike first. Therefore, understand me well, the threat that I hold out to you is this —"

Buckingham clenched his hands; but Raoul continued, as though he had not observed the movement: "At the very first word beyond the respect and deference due to her royal Highness, which you permit yourself to use towards her — Oh, be patient, M. de Buckingham! I am."

"You?"

"Certainly. So long as her royal Highness remained under the care of her English escort, I held my peace; but from the very moment she stepped on French ground, and now that we have received her in the name of the prince, I warn you that at the first mark of disrespect which you in your insane attachment may exhibit towards the royal house of France, I shall have one of two courses to follow: either to declare in the presence of every one the madness with which you are now affected, and get you ignominiously dismissed to England; or, if you prefer it, to run my dagger through your throat before the whole court. This second alternative seems to me the more convenient, and I think I shall hold to it."

Buckingham had become paler than the profusion of English lace around his neck. "M. de Bragelonne," he said, "is it, indeed, a gentleman who is speaking to me?"

"Yes; only the gentleman is speaking to a madman. Get cured, my Lord, and he will hold quite another language to you."

"But, M. de Bragelonne," murmured the duke, in a voice half choked, and putting his hand to his neck, "do you not see I am dying?"

"If your death were to take place at this moment, my Lord," replied Raoul, with unruffled composure, "I should indeed regard it as a great happiness, for this circumstance would prevent all kinds of evil remarks, not alone about yourself, but also about those illustrious persons whom your devotion is compromising in so absurd a manner."

"You are right, you are right," said the young man, beside himself. "Yes, yes; better to die than to suffer as I do at this moment!" and he grasped a beautiful dagger, the handle of which was inlaid with precious stones, and which he half drew from his breast.

Raoul thrust the duke's hand aside. "Be careful what you do!" he said. "If you do not kill yourself, you commit a ridiculous action; and if you do kill yourself, you sprinkle blood upon the nuptial robe of the princess of England."

Buckingham for a minute gasped for breath; during this interval his lips quivered, his features worked convulsively, and his eyes wandered, as though in delirium. Then suddenly, "M. de Bragelonne," he said, "I know nowhere a nobler mind than yours; you are the worthy son of the most perfect gentleman that ever lived. Keep your tents!" and he threw his arms round Raoul's neck.

All who were present, astounded at this conduct, — which was such as they could hardly have expected, considering the violence of the one adversary and the determination of the other, — began immediately to clap their hands, and a thousand cheers and joyful shouts arose from all sides. De Guiche, in his turn, embraced Buckingham, somewhat against his inclination; but, at all

events, he did embrace him. This was the signal for French and English to do the same; and they who until that moment had looked at each other with restless uncertainty, fraternized on the spot. In the mean time arrived the retinue of the princess, who but for Bragelonne would have found two armies in conflict and blood upon the flowers. All was quiet when the head of the procession appeared.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

NIGHT.

Concord had returned to resume its place amid the tents. English and French rivalled one another in their devotion and courteous attention to the illustrious travellers, and in politeness to one another. The English sent to the French baskets of flowers, of which they had made a plentiful provision to celebrate the arrival of the young princess; the French, in return, invited the English to a supper which was to be given the next day. Congratulations were poured in upon the princess everywhere during her journey. From the respect paid her on all sides, she seemed like a queen; and from the adoration of a few, she seemed like a goddess. The queen-mother gave the French the most affectionate reception. France was her native country, and she had suffered too much unhappiness in England to have made her forget France. She taught her daughter, then, by her own affection for it, to love a country where they had both been hospitably received, and where a brilliant future was opening before them.

After the public entry was over, and the spectators in the streets had somewhat dispersed, and the sound of the music and the cheering of the crowd could be heard no more; when the night had closed in, wrapping with its star-covered mantle the sea, the harbor, the town, and the surrounding country, still excited by the great event of the day, De Guiche returned to his

tent, and seated himself upon one of the stools with so profound an expression of distress that Bragelonne kept his eyes fixed on him until he heard him sigh, and then he approached him. The count had thrown himself back on his seat, leaning his shoulders against the wall of the tent, and remained thus, with his face buried in his hands and with heaving chest and restless limbs.

"You are suffering?" asked Raoul.

"Cruelly."

"Bodily, I suppose?"

"Yes; bodily."

"This has indeed been a harassing day," continued the young man, his eyes fixed upon his friend.

"Yes; a night's rest will restore me."

"Shall I leave you?"

"No; I wish to talk to you."

"You shall not speak to me, De Guiche, until you have first answered my questions."

"Proceed then."

"You will be frank with me?"

"As I always am."

"Can you imagine why Buckingham has been so violent?"

"I suspect why."

"Because he is in love with the princess, is it not?"

"One could almost swear it, to see him."

"You are mistaken; it is nothing of the kind."

"It is you who are mistaken, Raoul. I have read his distress in his eyes, in his every gesture and action, the whole day."

"You are a poet, my dear count, and find subjects for your muse everywhere."

"I can perceive love clearly enough."

"Where it does not exist."

"Nay, where it does exist."

"Do you not think you are deceiving yourself, De Guiche?"

"I am convinced of what I say," said the count.

"Now inform me, Count," asked Raoul, fixing a penetrating look upon him, "what has happened to render you so clear-sighted?"

Guiche hesitated for a moment, and then answered, "Self-love, I suppose."

"Self-love is a very long word, De Guiche."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that generally you are less out of spirits than seems to be the case this evening."

"I am fatigued."

"Listen to me, dear friend! We have been campaigners together; we have been on horseback for eighteen hours at a time, and our horses even, dying from sheer exhaustion or hunger, have fallen beneath us, and yet we have laughed at our mishaps. Believe me, it is not fatigue which saddens you to-night."

"It is annoyance, then."

"What annoyance?"

"That of this evening."

"The mad conduct of the Duke of Buckingham, do you mean?"

"Of course. Is it not vexatious for us, the representatives of our sovereign master, to see an Englishman wooing our future mistress, the second lady in the kingdom?"

"Yes, you're right; but I do not think any danger is to be apprehended from Buckingham."

"No; still, he is intrusive. Did he not, on his arrival here, almost succeed in creating a disturbance between the English and ourselves? And had it not been for you,

for your admirable prudence, for your singular firmness, swords would have been drawn in the very streets of the town."

"You observe, however, that he has changed."

"Yes, certainly; but it is that which amazes me so much. You spoke to him in a low tone of voice. What did you say to him? You think he loves her; you admit that such a passion does not give way readily. He does not love her, then!" De Guiche pronounced the last words with so marked an expression that Raoul raised his head. The noble countenance of the young man expressed a displeasure easy to read.

"What I said to him, Count," replied Raoul, "I will repeat to you. Listen to me! I said, 'Monsieur, you are regarding with wistful feelings and with most injurious desire the sister of your prince, — her to whom you are not affianced, who is not, who can never be, anything to you; you are outraging those who, like ourselves, have come to seek a young girl to lead her to her husband.'"

"You spoke to him in that manner?" asked De Guiche, coloring.

"In those very terms. I even added more: 'How would you regard us,' I said, 'if you were to perceive among us a man mad enough, disloyal enough, to entertain sentiments other than those of the purest respect for a princess who is the destined wife of our master?'"

These words were so applicable to De Guiche that he turned pale, and, overcome by a sudden agitation, was barely able to stretch out one hand mechanically towards Raoul, while with the other he covered his eyes and face.

"But," continued Raoul, not interrupted by this demonstration of his friend, "Heaven be praised, the French, who are pronounced to be thoughtless and indiscreet, reckless even, are capable of bringing a calm and sound

judgment to bear on matters of such high importance. I added even more: 'Learn, my Lord Buckingham, that we gentlemen of France serve our kings by sacrificing for them our passions as well as our fortunes and our lives; and whenever it may chance to happen that the tempter suggests one of those vile thoughts which set the heart on fire, we extinguish that flame, even though it be quenched with our blood. Thus we save the honor of three at once,— our country's, our master's, and our own. It is thus that we act, your Grace; it is thus that every man of honor ought to act.' And that is the way, my dear Guiche," continued Raoul, "in which I addressed the Duke of Buckingham; and he submitted unresistingly to my arguments."

De Guiche, who had hitherto sat leaning forward while Raoul was speaking, drew himself up, his eyes glancing proudly. He seized Raoul's hand with his own feverish one; his cheeks, which had been as cold as ice, seemed on fire. "And you spoke right well," he said, in a voice half choked; "you are indeed a brave friend, Raoul. I thank you. And now, I entreat you, leave me to myself."

"Do you wish it?"

"Yes; I need repose. Many things have unsettled me to-day both in mind and body; when you return to-morrow I shall no longer be the same man."

"I leave you, then," said Raoul, and withdrew.

The count advanced a step towards his friend, and clasped him warmly in his arms; but in this friendly pressure Raoul could detect the nervous agitation of a great internal conflict.

The night was clear, starlit, and splendid; after the tempest the warmth of the sun had restored life, peace, and security everywhere. A few light fleecy clouds were floating in the heavens, and promised by their appearance

many days of beautiful weather, tempered by a gentle breeze from the east. Upon the large square in front of the hotel, the large shadows of the tents, intersected by the brilliant moonbeams, formed as it were a huge mosaic on the black and white flagstones. Soon the whole town was wrapped in slumber. A feeble light still glimmered in the princess's apartment, which looked out upon the square; and the soft rays from the expiring lamp seemed to resemble the calm sleep of a young girl, hardly yet sensible of existence, and in whom the flame of life sinks down as sleep steals over the body.

Bragelonne left the tent with the slow and measured step of a man curious to observe, but anxious not to be seen. Then, sheltered behind the thick curtains of his own tent, and embracing with a glance the whole square, he noticed that after a few moments the curtains of De Guiche's tent were agitated, and then drawn partially aside. Behind them he could perceive the shadow of De Guiche; his eyes, glistening in the obscurity, were fastened ardently upon the princess's drawing-room, which was partially lighted by the lamp in the inner room. That soft light which illumined the windows was the count's star. The fervent aspirations of his whole soul could be read in his eyes. Raoul, concealed in the shadow, divined the many passionate thoughts which established between the tent of the young ambassador and the balcony of the princess a mysterious and magical bond of sympathy, — a bond created by thoughts intensified by so much strength and persistence of will, that they must have caused dreams of love to descend upon the perfumed couch which the count with the eyes of his soul devoured so eagerly.

But De Guiche and Raoul were not the only watchers. The window of one of the houses looking on the square

was open too, — the window of the house where Buckingham resided. By the aid of the rays of light which issued from this latter window, the profile of the duke could be distinctly seen, as he indolently reclined upon the carved balcony with its velvet hangings; he also was breathing in the direction of the princess's balcony his devotion and the wild longing of his love.

Bragelonne could not resist smiling as, thinking of the princess, he said to himself, "Hers is indeed a heart well besieged;" and then added compassionately, his thoughts reverting to Monsieur, "and he is a husband well threatened too. It is a good thing for him that he is a prince of such high rank, and that he has an army to guard that which is his own." Bragelonne watched for some time the conduct of the two lovers; listened to the sonorous breathing of Manicamp, who snored as imperiously as though he had his blue and gold instead of his violet suit, and then turned towards the night breeze which bore to him the distant song of a nightingale; then, after having laid in a due provision of melancholy, another nocturnal malady, he retired to rest, thinking, with regard to his own love affair, that perhaps four or six eyes quite as ardent as those of De Guiche and Buckingham were coveting his own idol in the château at Blois. "And Mademoiselle de Montalais is by no means a very safe guardian," said he to himself, as he sighed aloud.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

FROM HAVRE TO PARIS.

THE next day the *fêtes* took place, with all the pomp and animation which the resources of the town and the natural disposition of men's minds could supply. During the last few hours spent in Havre every preparation for the departure had been made. After the princess had taken leave of the English fleet and for the last time had saluted the country in saluting its flag, she entered her carriage surrounded by a brilliant escort. De Guiche had hoped that the Duke of Buckingham would return with the admiral to England; but Buckingham succeeded in demonstrating to the queen that there would be great impropriety in allowing the princess to proceed to Paris almost entirely alone. As soon as it had been settled that Buckingham was to accompany the princess, the young duke selected a court of gentlemen and officers to form his own suite; so that it was almost an army which proceeded towards Paris, scattering gold, and exciting the liveliest demonstrations as they passed through the different towns and villages on the route.

The weather was very fine. France is a beautiful country, especially along the route by which the procession passed. Spring cast its flowers and its balmy foliage upon their path. Normandy, with its vast variety of vegetation, its blue skies and silver rivers, displayed itself in all the loveliness of a Paradise for the new sister of the

king. *Fêtes* and manifestations of delight greeted them everywhere along the line of march. De Guiche and Buckingham forgot everything, — De Guiche in his anxiety to prevent any fresh attempts on the part of the Englishman, and Buckingham in his desire to awaken in the heart of the princess a softer remembrance of the country to which the recollection of many happy days were attached. But, alas ! the poor duke could perceive that the image of his dear England became from day to day more and more effaced in the princess's mind, in proportion as her affection for France became more deeply engraved on her heart. In fact, it was not difficult to perceive that his most devoted attention awakened no acknowledgment, and that the grace with which he rode one of his most fiery Yorkshire horses was thrown away ; for it was only casually and by the merest accident that the princess's eyes were turned towards him. In vain did he try, in order to fix upon himself one of those looks roving carelessly around or bestowed elsewhere, to produce from the animal he rode its greatest display of strength, speed, temper, and address ; in vain did he, by exciting his horse almost to madness, spur him, at the risk of dashing himself in pieces against the trees or of rolling in the ditches, over gates and barriers, or down the steep declivities of the hills. The princess, whose attention had been aroused by the noise, turned her head for a moment to observe the cause of it, and then, slightly smiling, again turned to her faithful guardians, Raoul and De Guiche, who were quietly riding at her carriage doors.

Then Buckingham felt himself a prey to all the tortures of jealousy ; an unknown, unheard-of burning anguish glided into his veins, and laid siege to his heart. And then, as if to show that he knew the folly of his conduct,

and that he wished to redeem by the humblest submission his flights of absurdity, he mastered his horse, and compelled him, reeking with sweat and flecked with foam, to champ his bit close beside the carriage, amid the crowd of courtiers. Occasionally he obtained a word from the princess as a recompense, and yet this word seemed almost a reproach to him. "That is well, my Lord Buckingham," she said; "now you are reasonable." Or a word from Raoul: "Your Grace is killing your horse."

Buckingham listened patiently to Raoul; for he instinctively felt, without having had any proof that such was the case, that Raoul checked the display of De Guiche's feelings, and that, had it not been for Raoul, some mad act or proceeding, either of the count or of Buckingham himself, would have brought about an open rupture or a disturbance and perhaps banishment. From the moment of that notable conversation which the two young men had had in front of the tents at Havre, when Raoul had made the duke perceive the impropriety of his conduct, Buckingham had felt himself attracted towards Raoul almost in spite of himself. He often entered into conversation with him; and it was nearly always to talk to him either of his father or of D'Artagnan, their common friend, in whose praise Buckingham was almost as enthusiastic as Raoul. Raoul endeavored, as much as possible, to make the conversation turn upon this subject in De Wardes' presence, who had during the whole journey felt hurt at the superior position taken by Bragelonne, and especially by his influence over De Guiche.

De Wardes had that keen and observant penetration which all evil natures possess; he had immediately remarked De Guiche's melancholy, and the nature of his regard for the princess. Instead, however, of treating

the subject with the same reserve which Raoul had practised, instead of regarding with proper respect the obligations and duties of society, De Wardes resolutely attacked in the count that ever-sounding chord of juvenile audacity and egotistical pride. It happened one evening, during a halt at Mantes, that while De Guiche and De Wardes were leaning against a barrier, engaged in conversation, Buckingham and Raoul were also talking together as they walked up and down. Manicamp was engaged in devoted attentions to the princesses, who already treated him without any reserve, on account of his pliant nature, his frank courtesy of manner, and his conciliatory disposition.

"Confess," said De Wardes to the count, "that you are really ill, and that your pedagogue has not succeeded in curing you."

"I do not understand you," said the count.

"And yet it is easy enough; you are dying of love."

"You are mad, De Wardes."

"Madness it would be, I admit, if the princess were really indifferent to your suffering; but she takes so much notice of it that she compromises herself, and I tremble lest, on our arrival at Paris, your pedagogue, M. de Bragelonne, may denounce both of you."

"For shame, De Wardes, again attacking Bragelonne!"

"Come, come, a truce to child's play!" replied the count's evil genius, in an undertone; "you know, as well as I do, what I mean. Besides, you must have observed how the princess's glance softens as she speaks to you; you can tell, by the very inflection of her voice, what pleasure she takes in listening to you, and can feel how thoroughly she appreciates the verses you recite to her. You cannot deny, too, that every morning she tells you how indifferently she slept the previous night."

"True, De Wardes, quite true; but what good is there in your telling me all that?"

"Is it not important to see things clearly?"

"No, no; not when the things I see are enough to drive one mad;" and he turned uneasily in the direction of the princess, as if, while repelling the insinuations of De Wardes, he wished to find confirmation of them in her eyes.

"Stay, stay!" said De Wardes; "look! she calls you; do you understand? Profit by the occasion; the pedagogue is not here."

De Guiche could not resist; an invincible attraction drew him towards the princess. De Wardes smiled as he saw him withdraw.

"You are mistaken, Monsieur," said Raoul, suddenly leaping over the barrier against which, the previous moment, the two friends had been leaning; "the pedagogue is here, and has overheard you."

De Wardes, at the sound of Raoul's voice, which he recognized without having occasion to look at him, half drew his sword.

"Put up your sword," said Raoul; "you know perfectly well that until our journey is at an end every demonstration of that nature is useless. Sheath your sword, but likewise sheath your tongue. Why do you distil into the heart of the man you term your friend all the bitterness which infects your own? Toward myself you wish to arouse a feeling of hatred in a man of honor, — my father's friend and my own; and as for the count, you wish him to love one who is destined for your master. Really, Monsieur, I should regard you as a coward, and a traitor too, if I did not with greater justice regard you as a madman."

"Monsieur," exclaimed De Wardes, exasperated, "I was

not mistaken, I find, in terming you a pedagogue; the tone you assume, and the style which is peculiarly your own, is that of a Jesuit flogger, and not of a gentleman. Discontinue, I beg, whenever I am present, this style I complain of, and the tone also. I hate M. d'Artagnan because he was guilty of a cowardly act towards my father."

"You lie, Monsieur!" said Raoul, coolly.

"You give me the lie, Monsieur?" exclaimed De Wardes.

"Why not, if what you assert be untrue?"

"You give me the lie, and do not draw your sword?"

"I have resolved, Monsieur, not to kill you until we have delivered the princess to her husband."

"Kill me! Believe me, Monsieur, your schoolmaster's rod does not kill so easily."

"No," replied Raoul, sternly, "but M. d'Artagnan's sword kills. Not only do I possess his sword, but he has himself taught me how to use it; and with that sword, Monsieur, when a suitable time arrives, I shall avenge his name outraged by you."

"Take care, Monsieur!" exclaimed De Wardes; "if you do not immediately give me satisfaction, I will avail myself of every means to revenge myself."

"Indeed, Monsieur," said Buckingham, suddenly appearing upon the scene of action, "that is a threat which borders on assassination, and would therefore ill become a gentleman."

"What did you say, my Lord?" said De Wardes, turning towards him.

"I said that the words you have just spoken are displeasing to my English ears."

"Very well, Monsieur, if what you say is true," exclaimed De Wardes, thoroughly incensed, "so much the better; I shall at least find in you one man who will not escape me. Understand my words as you like."

"I understand them in the manner they cannot but be understood," answered Buckingham, with that haughty tone which characterized him, and which even in ordinary conversation gave a tone of defiance to everything he said. "M. de Bragelonne is my friend; you insult M. de Bragelonne, and you shall give me satisfaction for that insult."

De Wardes cast a look upon Bragelonne, who, faithful to the character he had assumed, remained calm and unmoved, even after the duke's challenge.

"It would seem that I did not insult M. de Bragelonne, since M. de Bragelonne, who carries a sword by his side, does not consider himself insulted."

"At all events, you insult some one?"

"Yes, I insult M. d'Artagnan," resumed De Wardes, who had observed that this name was the only sting with which he could arouse the anger of Raoul.

"That, then," said Buckingham, "is another matter."

"Precisely so," said De Wardes; "it is the province of M. d'Artagnan's friends to defend him."

"I am entirely of your opinion, Monsieur," replied the Englishman, who had regained all his indifference of manner. "If M. de Bragelonne were offended, I could not reasonably be expected to espouse his quarrel, since he is himself here; but since M. d'Artagnan is in question —"

"You will of course leave me to deal with the matter," said De Wardes.

"Nay, the very contrary, I draw my sword," said Buckingham, unsheathing it as he spoke; "for if M. d'Artagnan injured your father, he rendered, or at least did all that he could to render, a great service to mine."

De Wardes seemed thunderstruck.

"M. d'Artagnan," continued Buckingham, "is the bravest gentleman I know. I shall be delighted, as I

owe him many personal obligations, to settle them with you, by crossing my sword with yours." At the same moment Buckingham drew his sword gracefully, saluted Raoul, and put himself on his guard.

De Wardes advanced a step to meet him.

"Stay, Messieurs!" said Raoul, advancing towards them, and placing his own drawn sword between the combatants; "all this is hardly worth the trouble of blood being shed almost under the eyes of the princess. M. de Wardes speaks ill of M. d'Artagnan, but he is not even acquainted with that gentleman."

"What, Monsieur!" said De Wardes, setting his teeth hard together, and resting the point of his sword on the toe of his boot, "do you assert that I do not know M. d'Artagnan?"

"Certainly not; you do not know him," replied Raoul, coldly, "and you are even not aware where he is to be found."

"Not know where he is?"

"Doubtless, such must be the case, since you fix your quarrel with him upon strangers, instead of seeking M. d'Artagnan where he is to be found." De Wardes turned pale. "Well, Monsieur," continued Raoul, "I will tell you where M. d'Artagnan is. He is now in Paris; when on duty, he resides at the Louvre; when not so, in the Rue des Lombards. M. d'Artagnan can be easily found at either of those two places. Having, therefore, as you assert, so many causes of complaint against him, you do not show your courage in not seeking him out, so that he may give you that satisfaction you seem to ask of every one but himself." De Wardes passed his hand across his forehead, which was covered with perspiration. "For shame, M. de Wardes!" continued Raoul, "so quarrelsome a disposition is hardly becoming after the publica-

tion of the edicts against duels. Pray think of that! The king will be incensed at our disobedience, particularly at such a time; and his Majesty will be right."

"Excuses!" murmured De Wardes, "pretexts!"

"Come now," replied Raoul, "that remark of yours is arrant nonsense, my dear M. de Wardes; you know very well that the Duke of Buckingham is a man of undoubted courage, who has already fought ten duels and is ready to fight the eleventh. His name alone is significant enough. So far as I am concerned, you are well aware that I can fight also. I fought at Lens, at Bléneau, at the Dunes in front of the artillery, a hundred paces in front of the line, while you, by the way, were a hundred paces behind it. It is true that on that occasion there was by far too great a crowd of people for your courage to be observed, and on that account, perhaps, you suppressed it; while here it would be a display, and would excite remark. You wish that others should talk of you, — in what manner you do not care. Very well, do not depend upon me, M. de Wardes, to assist you in your designs, for I shall certainly not afford you that pleasure."

"Sensibly observed," said Buckingham, putting up his sword; "and I ask your forgiveness, M. de Bragelonne, for having allowed myself to yield to a first impulse."

De Wardes, however, on the contrary, perfectly furious, bounded forward, and raised his sword threateningly against Raoul, who had scarcely time to put himself in a posture of defence.

"Take care, Monsieur," said Bragelonne, tranquilly, "or you will put out one of my eyes."

"You will not fight, then?" cried De Wardes.

"Not at this moment; but this I promise to do, immediately on our arrival at Paris: I will conduct you to

M. d'Artagnan, to whom you shall detail all the causes of complaint you have against him. M. d'Artagnan will solicit the king's permission to measure swords with you. The king will yield his consent, and when you shall have received your sword-thrust in due course, my dear M. de Wardes, you will consider, in a calmer frame of mind, the precepts of the gospel which enjoin forgetfulness of injuries."

"Ah!" exclaimed De Wardes, furious at this imperturbable coolness, "one can clearly see that you are half a bastard, M. de Bragelonne!"

Raoul became as pale as death; his eyes flashed like lightning, and made De Wardes fall back. Buckingham himself was horror-struck, and threw himself between the two adversaries, whom he expected to see precipitate themselves on each other. De Wardes had reserved this insult for the last; he clasped his sword convulsively in his hand, and awaited the encounter. "You are right, Monsieur," said Raoul, mastering his emotion, "I am only acquainted with my father's name; but I know too well that the Comte de la Fère is an upright and honorable man to fear for a single moment that there is, as you seem to say, any stain upon my birth. My ignorance, therefore, of my mother's name is merely a misfortune for me, and not a reproach. You are deficient in loyalty of conduct, Monsieur; you are wanting in courtesy, in reproaching me with a misfortune. No matter; the insult is given, and this time I hold myself insulted. It is quite understood, then, that after you shall have received satisfaction from M. d'Artagnan, you will settle your quarrel with me."

"I admire your prudence, Monsieur," replied De Wardes, with a bitter smile; "a little while ago you promised me a sword-thrust from M. d'Artagnan, and

now you offer me one from yourself, after I shall have received his."

"Do not disturb yourself," replied Raoul, with concentrated anger; "in matters of fence M. d'Artagnan is exceedingly skilful, and I will beg him as a favor to treat you as he did your father, — in other words, not to put an end to your life, but to leave me the pleasure, after your recovery, of killing you outright; for you have a wicked heart, M. de Wardes, and in very truth, too many precautions cannot be taken against you."

"I shall take my precautions against you, Monsieur," said De Wardes; "be assured of it."

"Allow me, Monsieur," said Buckingham, "to translate your remark by a piece of advice I am about to give M. de Bragelonne: M. de Bragelonne, wear a cuirass."

De Wardes clenched his hands. "Ah! I understand," said he, "you two gentlemen intend to wait until you have taken that precaution before you measure your swords against mine."

"Very well, Monsieur," said Raoul, "since you positively will have it so, let us settle the affair now;" and drawing his sword, he advanced towards De Wardes.

"What are you going to do?" asked Buckingham.

"Be easy," said Raoul; "it will not be very long."

De Wardes placed himself on his guard; their swords crossed. De Wardes flew upon Raoul with such impetuosity that at the first clashing of the steel it was evident to Buckingham that Raoul would manage his adversary. Buckingham stepped aside, and watched the struggle. Raoul was as calm as if he were handling a foil instead of a sword; having retreated a step to gain room, he parried three or four fierce thrusts which De Wardes made at him, caught the sword of the latter within his own and sent it flying twenty paces the other side of the

barrier. Then, as De Wardes stood disarmed and astounded at his defeat, Raoul sheathed his sword, seized him by the collar and the waistband, and hurled him also to the other side of the barrier, trembling and mad with rage.

"We shall meet again," growled De Wardes, rising from the ground and picking up his sword.

"*Pardieu!*" said Raoul, "I have done nothing for the last hour but say the same thing." Then, turning towards Buckingham, he said, "Not a word about this affair, Duke, I entreat you; I am ashamed to have gone so far, but my anger carried me away, and I ask your forgiveness for it, — forget it."

"Dear viscount," said the duke, pressing within his own the vigorous and valiant hand of his companion, "allow me, on the contrary, to remember it, and to look after your safety; that man is dangerous, — he will kill you."

"My father," replied Raoul, "lived for twenty years under the menace of a much more formidable enemy, and he still lives."

"Your father had good friends, Viscount."

"Yes," sighed Raoul, "such friends, indeed, that none are now left like them."

"Do not say that, I beg, at the very moment when I offer you my friendship;" and Buckingham opened his arms to embrace Raoul, who delightedly received the proffered alliance. "In my family," added Buckingham, "you are aware, M. de Bragelonne, that we die to save those we love."

"I know it well, Duke," replied Raoul.

CHAPTER XL.

WHAT THE CHEVALIER DE LORRAINE THOUGHT OF THE PRINCESS.

Nothing further disturbed the serenity of the journey. Under a pretext which was little remarked, M. de Wardes went forward in advance of the others. He took Manicamp with him, for his equable and dreamy disposition acted as a counterpoise to his own. It is a subject of remark, that quarrelsome and restless characters invariably seek the companionship of gentle, timorous dispositions, as if the former sought, in the contrast, a repose from their own ill-humor, and the latter a protection for their own weakness. Buckingham and Bragelonne, admitting De Guiche into their friendship, sounded, in concert with him, the praises of the princess during the whole of the journey. Bragelonne had, however, insisted that their three voices should be in concert, instead of singing in solo parts, as De Guiche and his rival seemed to have acquired a dangerous habit of doing. This style of harmony pleased the queen-mother exceedingly; but it was not perhaps so agreeable to the young princess, who was an incarnation of coquetry, and who without fear for herself sought occasions of peril. She possessed one of those fearless and incautious dispositions which find gratification in an excess of susceptibility, and for whom, also, danger has a certain fascination. And so her glances, her smiles, her toilets — an inexhaustible armory of weapons of offence — were showered down upon the

three young men with overwhelming force; and from her well-stored arsenal issued glances, compliments, and a thousand other charming little attentions which were intended to strike at long range the gentlemen who formed the escort, the townspeople, the officers of the different cities through which she passed, pages, populace, and servants: it was wholesale slaughter, a universal devastation.

By the time the princess arrived at Paris, she had reduced to slavery about a hundred thousand lovers, and brought in her train to Paris half-a-dozen men who were almost mad about her, and two who were quite out of their minds. Raoul was the only person who divined the power of this woman's attraction; and as his heart was already engaged, and thus proof against her arrows, he arrived at the capital cool and distrustful. Occasionally during the journey he conversed with the Queen of England respecting the power of fascination which the princess exercised; and the mother, whom so many misfortunes and deceptions had taught experience, replied: "Henrietta was sure to be illustrious in one way or another, whether born in a palace or in obscurity; for she is a woman of great imagination, capricious, and self-willed."

De Wardes and Manicamp, in their character of heralds, had announced the princess's arrival.

The procession was met at Nanterre by a brilliant escort of cavaliers and carriages. It was Monsieur himself, who, followed by the Chevalier de Lorraine and by his favorites, the latter being themselves followed by a portion of the king's military household, had come to meet his affianced bride. At St. Germain the princess and her mother had changed their heavy travelling-carriage, somewhat impaired by the journey, for a rich and

elegant chariot drawn by six horses with white and gold harness. Seated in this open carriage, as though upon a throne, and beneath a canopy of embroidered silk fringed with waving plumes, appeared the young and lovely princess, on whose beaming face were reflected the softened rose-tints which suited her pearly skin to perfection. Monsieur, on reaching the carriage, was struck by her beauty; he signified his admiration in so marked a manner that the Chevalier de Lorraine shrugged his shoulders among the group of courtiers, while Buckingham and the Comte de Guiche were almost heart-broken. After the usual courtesies had been rendered, and the ceremony completed, the whole procession slowly resumed the road to Paris. The presentations had been carelessly made, and Buckingham, with the rest of the English gentlemen, had been introduced to Monsieur, from whom they had received but a very indifferent attention. But during their progress, as he observed that the duke devoted himself with his accustomed ardor to the carriage door, he asked the Chevalier de Lorraine, his inseparable companion, "Who is that cavalier?"

"He was presented to your Highness a short time since; it is the handsome Duke of Buckingham."

"Yes, yes, I remember."

"The princess's knight," added the favorite, with an inflection of the voice which envious minds can alone give to the simplest phrases.

"What do you say?" replied the prince, who was still on horseback.

"I said, 'the princess's knight.'"

"Has she a recognized knight, then?"

"One would think you might judge of that for yourself; see how they are laughing and flirting, both of them."

"All three of them."

"What do you mean by all three?"

"Do you not see that De Guiche is one of the party?"

"Yes, I see. But what does that prove?—that the princess has two admirers instead of one."

"You poison everything, viper!"

"I poison nothing. Ah! your royal Highness's mind is very perverted. The honors of the kingdom of France are being paid to your wife, and you are not satisfied."

The Duke of Orleans dreaded the satirical humor of the chevalier whenever he found it reached a certain degree of bitterness, and he changed the conversation abruptly. "The princess is pretty," said he, negligently, as if he were speaking of a stranger.

"Yes," replied the chevalier, in the same tone.

"You say 'yes' like a 'no.' She has very beautiful black eyes, I think."

"Yes, but small."

"True, but they are brilliant. She has a good figure."

"Her figure is a little spoiled, Monseigneur."

"I do not deny it. She has a noble appearance."

"Yes, but her face is thin."

"I thought her teeth beautiful."

"They can easily be seen, for her mouth is large enough. Decidedly I was wrong, my Lord; you are certainly handsomer than your wife."

"But do you think me as handsome as Buckingham?"

"Certainly, and he thinks so too; for, look, my Lord, he is redoubling his attentions to the princess, to prevent your effacing the impression he has made."

Monsieur made a movement of impatience; but as he noticed a smile of triumph pass over the chevalier's lips, he drew up his horse to a foot-pace. "Why," said he, "should I occupy myself any longer about my cousin?

Do I not already know her? Were we not brought up together? Did I not see her at the Louvre when she was quite a child?"

"A great change has taken place in her since then, Prince," said the chevalier; "at the period you allude to, she was somewhat less brilliant, and somewhat less proud too. One evening, particularly, you may remember, my Lord, the king refused to dance with her, because he thought her plain and badly dressed!"

These words made the Duke of Orleans frown. It was by no means flattering for him to marry a princess of whom, when young, the king had not thought much. He might probably have replied, but at this moment De Guiche quitted the carriage to join the prince. From a distance he had seen the prince and the chevalier, and full of anxious attention he seemed to be trying to guess the nature of the remarks which they had just exchanged.

Whether from treachery or from imprudence, the chevalier did not take the trouble to dissimulate. "Count," said he, "you 're a man of excellent taste."

"Thank you for the compliment," replied De Guiche; "but why do you say that?"

"Well, I appeal to his Highness!"

"No doubt of it," said Monsieur; "and Guiche knows perfectly well that I regard him as a most finished cavalier."

"Well, that question settled, Count, I resume. You have been in the princess's society, Count, for the last week, have you not?"

"Yes," replied De Guiche, coloring in spite of himself.

"Well, then, tell us frankly, what do you think of her personal appearance?"

"Of her personal appearance?" returned De Guiche, amazed.

"Yes; of her appearance, of her mind, — of herself, in fact."

Astounded by this question, De Guiche hesitated in answering.

"Come, come, De Guiche," resumed the chevalier, laughingly, "tell us your opinion frankly; the prince commands it."

"Yes, yes," said the prince, "be frank."

De Guiche stammered out a few unintelligible words.

"I am perfectly well aware," returned Monsieur, "that the subject is a delicate one, but you know you can tell me everything. What do you think of her?"

In order to avoid betraying his real thoughts, De Guiche had recourse to the only defence which a man taken by surprise really has, and accordingly told an untruth. "I do not think the princess," he said, "either good or bad looking, yet rather good than bad looking."

"What! my dear count," exclaimed the chevalier, "you, who went into such ecstasies and uttered so many exclamations at the sight of her portrait!"

De Guiche colored violently. Very fortunately his horse, which was slightly restive, enabled him by a sudden plunge to conceal his agitation. "What portrait?" he murmured, joining them again.

The chevalier had not taken his eyes off him. "Yes, the portrait. Was not the miniature a good likeness?"

"I do not remember. I have forgotten the portrait; it has quite escaped my recollection."

"And yet it made a very marked impression upon you," said the chevalier.

"That is not unlikely."

"Is she clever, at all events?" inquired the duke.

"I believe so, my Lord."

"Is M. de Buckingham so too?" said the chevalier.

"I do not know."

"My own opinion is that he must be," replied the chevalier, "for he makes the princess laugh, and she seems to take no little pleasure in his society, — which never is the case with a clever woman when in the company of a simpleton."

"Of course, then, he must be clever," said De Guiche, simply.

At this moment Raoul opportunely arrived, seeing how De Guiche was pressed by his dangerous questioner, to whom he addressed a remark, and so changed the conversation.

The entrance into the city was brilliant and joyous. The king, in honor of his brother, had directed that the festivities should be on a scale of the greatest magnificence. The princess and her mother alighted at the Louvre, where during their exile they had so gloomily submitted to obscurity, misery, and privations of every description. That palace, which had been so inhospitable a residence for the unhappy daughter of Henry IV., with its naked walls, its sunken floorings, its ceilings covered with cobwebs, the vast but broken marble chimney-places, its cold hearths on which the charity extended to them by parliament had hardly permitted a fire to glow, was completely altered in appearance. It now contained the richest hangings and the thickest carpets, glistening flagstones and new pictures, with their richly gilded frames; everywhere could be seen candelabras, mirrors, and furniture and fittings of the most sumptuous character; everywhere also were guards of the proudest military bearing with floating plumes, crowds of attendants and courtiers in the antechambers

and upon the staircases. In the courtyards, where the grass but lately grew, — as if the ungrateful Mazarin had thought it a good idea to let the Parisians perceive that solitude and disorder were, with misery and despair, the proper accompaniments of a fallen monarchy, — in these immense courtyards, formerly silent and desolate, paraded cavaliers whose prancing horses drew sparks from the glistening flagstones. Carriages were filled with young and beautiful women, who awaited the opportunity of saluting, as she passed, the daughter of that daughter of France who during her widowhood and her exile had sometimes gone without wood for her fire or bread for her table, and whom the meanest attendants of the palace had treated with indifference and contempt.

And so Madame Henrietta returned to the Louvre, her heart swollen with grief and bitter recollections; while her daughter, whose disposition was fickle and forgetful, returned to it with triumph and delight. Madame Henrietta knew but too well that the present brilliant reception was paid to the happy mother of a king restored to his throne, and that throne second to none in Europe; while the poor reception she had before received was paid to her, the daughter of Henry IV., as a punishment for having been unfortunate.

After the princesses had been installed in their apartments and had rested themselves, the gentlemen who had formed their escort, having in like manner recovered from their fatigue, resumed their accustomed habits and occupations.

Bragelonne began by setting off to see his father; but he had left for Blois. He then tried to see M. d'Artagnan; but he, being engaged in the organization of a new military household for the king, could not be found anywhere. Bragelonne next fell back upon De Guiche;

but the count was occupied in a long conference with his tailors and with Manicamp, which consumed his whole time. With the Duke of Buckingham he fared still worse, for the duke was purchasing horses after horses, diamonds upon diamonds; he monopolized every embroiderer, jeweller, and tailor that Paris could boast of. Between De Guiche and Buckingham a vigorous contest ensued, more or less courteous, in which, in order to insure success, the duke was ready to spend a million; while the Maréchal de Grammont had only allowed his son sixty thousand livres. So Buckingham laughed and spent his million. De Guiche groaned in despair, and would have torn his hair had it not been for the advice Bragelonne gave him.

"A million!" repeated De Guiche, daily; "I must submit. Why will not the marshal advance me a portion of my patrimony?"

"Because you will throw it away," said Raoul.

"What can that matter to him? If I am to die of it, I shall die of it, and then I shall need nothing further."

"But what need is there to die?" said Raoul.

"I do not wish to be surpassed in elegance by an Englishman."

"My dear count," said Manicamp, "elegance is not a costly commodity, it is only a very difficult one."

"Yes, but difficult things cost a good deal of money, and I have only sixty thousand livres."

"A very embarrassing state of things, truly!" said De Wardes. "Spend as much as Buckingham; there is only a difference of nine hundred and forty thousand livres."

"Where am I to find them?"

"Get into debt."

"I am so already."

"A greater reason for getting further."

Advice like this resulted in De Guiche becoming excited to such an extent that he committed extravagances where Buckingham only incurred expenses. The rumor of this prodigality delighted the hearts of all the shopkeepers in Paris; from the hotel of the Duke of Buckingham to that of Grammont nothing but wonders was dreamed of.

While all this was going on, the princess was resting herself, and Bragelonne was engaged in writing to Mademoiselle de la Vallière. He had already despatched four letters, and not an answer to any one of them had been received, when, on the very morning fixed for the marriage ceremony, which was to take place in the chapel at the Palais-Royal, Raoul, who was dressing, heard his valet announce M. de Malicorne. "What can this Malicorne want with me?" thought Raoul; and then said to his valet, "Let him wait."

"It is a gentleman from Blois," said the valet.

"Admit him at once," said Raoul, eagerly.

Malicorne entered, brilliant as a star, and wearing a superb sword by his side. After having saluted Raoul most gracefully, he said: "M. de Bragelonne, I am the bearer of a thousand compliments from a lady to you."

Raoul colored. "From a lady," said he, — "from a lady of Blois?"

"Yes, Monsieur; from Mademoiselle de Montalais."

"Thank you, Monsieur; I recollect you now," said Raoul. "And what does Mademoiselle de Montalais desire of me?"

Malicorne drew four letters from his pocket which he offered to Raoul.

"My own letters! is it possible?" he said, turning pale; "my letters, and the seals unbroken!"

"Monsieur, your letters did not find, at Blois, the per-

son to whom they were addressed, and so they are now returned to you."

"Mademoiselle de la Vallière has left Blois, then?" exclaimed Raoul.

"A week ago."

"Where is she, then?"

"She must be at Paris, Monsieur."

"But how was it known that these letters came from me?"

"Mademoiselle de Montalais recognized your handwriting and your seal," said Malicorne.

Raoul colored and smiled. "Mademoiselle de Montalais is exceedingly good," he said; "she is always kind and charming."

"Always, Monsieur."

"Surely she could give me some precise information about Mademoiselle de la Vallière. I could never find her in this immense city.

Malicorne drew another packet from his pocket. "You may possibly find in this letter what you are anxious to learn."

Raoul hurriedly broke the seal. The writing was that of Mademoiselle Aure, and the letter contained these words: —

PARIS, PALAIS-ROYAL.

The day of the nuptial benediction.

"What does this mean?" inquired Raoul of Malicorne; "you probably know, Monsieur."

"I do, Monsieur the Viscount."

"For pity's sake, tell me, then."

"Impossible, Monsieur."

"Why so?"

"Because Mademoiselle Aure has forbidden me to do so."

Raoul looked at his strange companion, and remained silent. "At least," he resumed, "tell me whether it is advantageous to me or not."

"That you will see."

"You are very strict in your reservations."

"Will you grant me a favor, Monsieur?" said Malicorne.

"In exchange for that which you refuse me?"

"Precisely."

"What is it?"

"I have the greatest desire to see the ceremony, and I have no ticket to admit me, in spite of all the steps I have taken to secure one. Could you get me admitted?"

"Certainly."

"Do me this kindness, then, I entreat, Monsieur the Viscount."

"Most willingly, Monsieur; come with me."

"I am exceedingly indebted to you, Monsieur," said Malicorne.

"I thought you were a friend of M. de Manicamp."

"I am, Monsieur; but this morning I was with him as he was dressing, and I let a bottle of blacking fall over his new dress, and he flew at me with his sword in his hand, so that I was obliged to make my escape. That is the reason I could not ask him for a ticket; he would have killed me."

"I can believe it," said Raoul. "I know Manicamp is capable of killing a man who has been unfortunate enough to commit the crime you have to reproach yourself with, but I will repair the mischief as far as you are concerned. I will but fasten my cloak, and shall then be ready to serve you, not only as a guide, but as an introducer also."

CHAPTER XLI.

THE SURPRISE OF MADEMOISELLE DE MONTALAIS.

The princess was married in the Chapel of the Palais-Royal, in the presence of a crowd of courtiers, who had been most scrupulously selected. However, notwithstanding the marked favor which an invitation indicated, Raoul, faithful to his promise to Malicorne, who was so anxious to witness the ceremony, obtained admission for him. After he had fulfilled this engagement, Raoul approached De Guiche, who, as if in contrast with his magnificent costume, exhibited a countenance so utterly cast down by grief that the Duke of Buckingham was the only one present who could contend with him in pallor and dejection.

"Take care, Count!" said Raoul, approaching his friend, and preparing to support him at the moment when the archbishop blessed the married couple. In fact, the Prince of Condé was seen attentively scrutinizing these two images of desolation, standing like caryatides at either side of the nave of the church. The count, therefore, kept a more careful watch over himself.

At the termination of the ceremony, the king and queen passed onward to the grand reception-room, where Madame and her suite were to be presented to them. It was remarked that the king, who had seemed more than surprised at his sister-in-law's appearance, was most flattering in his compliments to her. Again, it was remarked that the queen-mother, fixing a long and thoughtful gaze upon

Buckingham, leaned towards Madame de Motteville as though to ask her, "Do you not see how much he resembles his father?" and finally it was remarked that Monsieur watched everybody, and seemed very discontented. After the reception of the princes and ambassadors, Monsieur solicited the king's permission to present to him, as well as to Madame, the persons belonging to their new household.

"Are you aware, Viscount," inquired the Prince de Condé of Raoul, "whether the household has been selected by a person of taste, and whether there are any faces worth looking at?"

"I have not the slightest idea, Monseigneur," replied Raoul.

"You affect ignorance, surely."

"In what way, Monseigneur?"

"You are a friend of De Guiche, who is one of the friends of the prince."

"That may be so, Monseigneur; but the matter having no interest whatever for me, I never questioned De Guiche on the subject; and De Guiche on his part, never having been questioned, has not communicated any particulars to me."

"But Manicamp?"

"It is true I saw M. de Manicamp at Havre, and during the journey here, but I was very careful to be as little inquisitive towards him as I had been towards De Guiche; besides, is it likely that M. de Manicamp should know anything of such matters? He is a person of only secondary importance."

"Eh, my dear viscount, do you not know better than that?" said the prince. "Why, it is these persons of secondary importance who on such occasions have all the influence; and the proof is that nearly everything

has been done through Manicamp's presentations to De Guiche and through De Guiche to Monsieur."

"Well, Monseigneur, I was completely ignorant of that," said Raoul; "and what your Highness does me the honor to impart is perfectly new to me."

"I will most readily believe you, although it seems incredible; besides, we shall not have long to wait. See, the flying squadron is advancing, as good Queen Catherine used to say. Ah! what pretty faces!"

A bevy of young girls at this moment entered the room, conducted by Madame de Navailles; and to Manicamp's credit, be it said, if indeed he had taken that part in their selection which the Prince de Condé had alleged, it was a display calculated to dazzle those who, like the prince, could appreciate every character and style of beauty. A young fair-complexioned girl, who might be twenty or twenty-one years of age, and whose large blue eyes flashed, as she opened them, in the most dazzling manner, walked at the head of the band, and was the first presented.

"Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente," said Madame de Navailles to Monsieur, who, as he bowed to his wife, repeated, "Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente."

"Ah," said the prince, turning to Raoul, "she seems tolerable enough."

"Yes," said Raoul; "she is pretty, but has a somewhat haughty style."

"Bah! we know these airs very well, Viscount; three months hence she will be tame enough. But look, — there indeed is a beauty!"

"Yes," said Raoul, "and one I am acquainted with."

"Mademoiselle Aure de Montalais," said Madame de Navailles. Monsieur repeated the full name carefully.

"Great heavens!" exclaimed Raoul, fixing his bewildered gaze upon the entrance doorway.

"What 's the matter?" inquired the prince; "was it Mademoiselle Aure de Montalais who made you utter such a 'Great heavens'?"

"No, Monseigneur, no," replied Raoul, pale and trembling.

"Well, then, if it be not Mademoiselle Aure de Montalais, it is that charming blonde who follows her. What beautiful eyes! She is rather thin, but has fascinations without number."

"Mademoiselle de la Baume le Blanc de la Vallière!" said Madame de Navailles; and as this name resounded through Raoul's whole being, a cloud seemed to rise from his heart to his eyes, so that he neither saw nor heard anything more. The prince, finding that Raoul remained silent under his railleries, moved forward to inspect somewhat closer the beautiful girls whom his first glance had already particularized.

"Louise here! Louise a maid of honor to Madame!" murmured Raoul; and his eyes, which did not suffice to satisfy his reason, wandered from Louise to Montalais. The latter had already emancipated herself from her assumed timidity, which she only needed for the presentation and for her reverences.

Mademoiselle de Montalais, from the corner of the room to which she had retired, was looking with no slight degree of assurance at the different persons present; and having discovered Raoul, she amused herself with the profound astonishment into which her own and her friend's presence there had thrown the poor lover. Her merry and mischievous look, which Raoul tried to avoid meeting, and yet which he sought inquiringly from time to time, placed Raoul on the rack. As for Louise, whether from natural timidity, or from some other reason for which Raoul could not account, she kept her eyes

constantly cast down; and intimidated, dazzled, and with heaving breast, she withdrew herself as much as possible, unaffected even by the hints which Montalais gave her with her elbow.

The whole scene was a perfect enigma to Raoul, the key to which the poor viscount would have given anything to obtain. But no one was there who could assist him, — not even Malicorne, who, a little uneasy at finding himself in the presence of so many persons of gentle birth, and not a little discouraged by Montalais's bantering glances, had described a circle, and by degrees had succeeded in getting a few paces from the prince, behind the group of maids of honor, and nearly within reach of Mademoiselle Aure's voice, she being the planet around which he, her humble satellite, seemed compelled to gravitate.

As he recovered his self-possession, Raoul fancied he recognized voices on his left which were familiar to him, and he perceived De Wardes, De Guiche, and the Chevalier de Lorraine conversing together. It is true that they were talking in tones so low that the sound of their words could hardly be heard in the vast apartment. To speak in that manner from any particular place without bending down, or turning round, or looking at the person with whom one is engaged in conversation, is a talent which cannot be immediately acquired in perfection by new-comers. A long study is needed for such conversations, which, without a look, gesture, or movement of the head, seemed like the conversation of a group of statues.

In fact, in the king's and the queen's grand assemblies, while their Majesties were speaking, and while every one present seemed to be listening with the most profound silence, some of these noiseless conversations took place, in which adulation was not the prevailing feature. But Raoul was one among others exceedingly clever in this

art, so much a matter of etiquette, so that from the movement of the lips he was often able to guess the sense of the words.

"Who is that Montalais?" inquired De Wardes, "and that La Vallière? What country-town have we had sent here?"

"Montalais?" said the Chevalier de Lorraine, "oh, I know her; she is a good sort of girl, whom we shall find amusing enough. La Vallière is a charming girl, slightly lame."

"Humph!" said De Wardes.

"Do not be absurd, De Wardes! There are some very characteristic and ingenious Latin axioms upon lame ladies."

"Messieurs, Messieurs," said De Guiche, looking at Raoul with uneasiness, "be a little careful, I entreat you."

But the uneasiness of the count, in appearance at least, was not needed. Raoul had preserved the firmest and most indifferent countenance, although he had not lost a word that had passed. He seemed to keep an account of the insolence and license of the two speakers, in order to settle matters with them at his earliest opportunity.

De Wardes seemed to guess what was passing in his mind, and continued, "Who are these young ladies' lovers?"

"Montalais's lover?" said the chevalier.

"Yes, Montalais first."

"Well, you, I, or De Guiche,—whoever likes, in fact."

"And the other?"

"Mademoiselle de la Vallière?"

"Yes."

"Take care, Messieurs," exclaimed De Guiche, anxious

to put a stop to De Wardes's reply, "take care! Madame is listening to us."

Raoul thrust his hand up to the wrist into his doublet, and left the mark of his nails on his flesh. But the very malignity which he saw was excited against these poor girls made him take a serious resolution. "Poor Louise," he said to himself, "has come here only with an honorable object in view and under honorable protection; but I must learn what that object is, and who it is that protects her;" and imitating Malicorne's manœuvre, he made his way towards the group of the maids of honor. The presentations soon terminated. The king, who had done nothing but look at and admire Madame, shortly afterwards left the reception-room, accompanied by the two queens. The Chevalier de Lorraine resumed his place beside Monsieur, and, as he accompanied him, insinuated a few drops of the poison which he had collected during the last hour, while looking at some of the new faces in the court, and suspecting that some hearts might be happy. A few of the persons present followed the king as he went out; but such of the courtiers as assumed an independence of character and professed a gallantry of disposition, began to approach the ladies. The prince paid his compliments to Mademoiselle de Tonnay-Charente; Buckingham devoted himself to Madame de Chalais and to Madame de Lafayette, whom Madame had already distinguished by her notice and whom she held in high regard. As for the Comte de Guiche, who had abandoned Monsieur as soon as he could approach Madame alone, he conversed, with great animation, with Madame de Valentinois and with Mesdemoiselles de Créquy and de Châtillon.

Amid these varied political and amorous interests, Malicorne was anxious to gain Montalais's attention;

but the latter preferred talking with Raoul, even if it were only to enjoy his numerous questions and his surprise. Raoul had gone straight to Mademoiselle de la Vallière, and had saluted her with the profoundest respect, at which Louise blushed and could not say a word. Montalais, however, hurried to her assistance.

"Well, Monsieur the Viscount, here we are, you see."

"I do indeed see you," said Raoul, smiling; "and it is exactly because you are here, that I wish to ask for some explanation."

Malicorne approached the group with his most fascinating smile.

"Go away, M. Malicorne," said Montalais; "really, you are exceedingly indiscreet." Malicorne bit his lips and retired a few steps, without making any reply. His smile, however, changed its expression, and from its former frankness became mocking in its expression.

"You would like an explanation, M. Raoul?" inquired Montalais.

"The situation calls for one, I think; Mademoiselle de la Vallière a maid of honor to Madame!"

"Why should not she be a maid of honor as well as myself?" inquired Montalais.

"Pray accept my compliments, young ladies," said Raoul, who fancied that he perceived that they were not disposed to answer him in a direct manner.

"Your remark was not made in a very complimentary manner, Monsieur the Viscount."

"Mine?"

"Certainly; I appeal to Louise."

"M. de Bragelonne probably thinks the position is above my condition," said Louise, hesitatingly.

"Oh, no, Mademoiselle," replied Raoul, eagerly; "you know very well that such is not my feeling. Were you

called upon to occupy a queen's throne, I should not be surprised; how much greater reason, then, such a position as this? The only circumstance which amazes me is that I should not have learned it until to-day, and that by mere accident."

"That is true," replied Montalais to Louise, with her usual giddiness; "you know nothing about it, and there is no reason why you should. M. de Bragelonne had written four letters to you; but your mother was the only person who remained behind at Blois, and it was necessary to prevent these letters from falling into her hands. I intercepted them, and returned them to M. Raoul; so that he believed you were still at Blois, while you were here in Paris, and had no idea how high you had risen in rank."

"Did you not inform M. Raoul, as I begged you to do?" exclaimed Louise.

"Why should I? — to give him an opportunity of making some of his severe remarks and moral reflections, and to undo what we had had so much trouble in getting done? Oh, certainly not!"

"Am I so very severe, then?" inquired Raoul.

"Besides," said Montalais, "it is sufficient to say that it suited me. I was about setting off for Paris; you were away. Louise was weeping her eyes out, — interpret that as you please. I begged a friend, a protector of mine, who had obtained the appointment for me, to solicit one for Louise; the appointment arrived. Louise left in order to get her costume prepared; as I had my own ready, I remained behind. I received your letters, and returned them to you, adding a few words, promising you a surprise. Your surprise is before you, Monsieur, and seems to be a fair one enough; you have nothing more to ask. Come, M. Malicorne, it is now time to leave

these young people together; they have many things to talk about. Give me your hand; I trust that you appreciate the honor which is conferred upon you, M. Malicorne."

"Forgive me, Mademoiselle," said Raoul, arresting the giddy girl, and giving to his voice an intonation the gravity of which contrasted with that of Montalais, — "forgive me; but may I inquire the name of the protector you speak of? — for if protection be extended to you, Mademoiselle, for which, indeed, so many reasons exist," added Raoul, bowing, "I do not see that the same reasons exist why Mademoiselle de la Vallière should be similarly protected."

"But, M. Raoul," said Louise, innocently, "the matter is very simple, and I do not see why I should not tell it to you myself. M. Malicorne obtained the appointment for me."

Raoul remained for a moment amazed, asking himself if they were trifling with him. He then turned round to interrogate Malicorne; but he had been hurried away by Montalais, and was already at some distance from them. Mademoiselle de la Vallière attempted to follow her friend; but Raoul, with gentle authority, detained her. "Louise, one word only, I beg."

"But, M. Raoul," said Louise, blushing, "we are alone; every one has left. They will become anxious, and will be looking for us."

"Fear nothing," said the young man, smiling; "we are neither of us of sufficient importance for our absence to be remarked."

"But I have my duty to perform, M. Raoul."

"Do not be alarmed, Mademoiselle! I am acquainted with the usages of the court. You will not be on duty until to-morrow; a few minutes are at your disposal, which

will enable you to give me the explanation I am about to have the honor to ask of you."

"How serious you are, M. Raoul!" said Louise, uneasily.

"Because the circumstance is a serious one. Are you listening?"

"I am listening; I would only repeat, Monsieur, that we are quite alone."

"You are right," said Raoul; and offering her his hand, he led the young girl into the gallery adjoining the reception-room, the windows of which looked out upon the square. Every one hurried towards the middle window, which had a balcony outside, from which all the details of the slow and formal preparations for departure could be seen. Raoul opened one of the side windows, and then, being alone with Louise, said to her: "You know, Louise, that from my childhood I have regarded you as my sister, as one who has been the confidante of all my troubles, to whom I have intrusted all my hopes."

"Yes, M. Raoul," she answered softly; "yes, I know that."

"You used, on your side, to show the same friendship towards me, and had the same confidence in me; why have you not, on this occasion, been my friend, and why have you shown a suspicion of me?" Mademoiselle de la Vallière did not answer. "I had thought you loved me," continued Raoul, whose voice became more and more agitated; "I had thought that you consented to all the plans which we together laid down for our own happiness, at the time when we wandered up and down the large walks of Cour-Cheverny and under the avenue of poplar-trees leading to Blois. You do not answer me, Louise." He stopped. "Is it possible," he inquired, breathing with difficulty, "that you no longer love me?"

"I did not say so," replied Louise, softly.

"Oh, tell me the truth, I implore you! All my hopes in life are centred in you. I chose you for your gentle and simple tastes. Do not suffer yourself to be dazzled, Louise, now that you are in the midst of a court where all that is pure becomes corrupt, where all that is young soon grows old. Louise, close your ears, that you may not hear what may be said; shut your eyes, that you may not see the examples before you; shut your lips, that you may not inhale the corrupting influences about you. Without falsehood or subterfuge, Louise, am I to believe what Mademoiselle de Montalais stated? Louise, did you come to Paris because I was no longer at Blois?"

La Vallière blushed and concealed her face in her hands.

"Yes, it was so, then," exclaimed Raoul, enraptured; "that was your reason for coming here. Oh, I love you as I never yet loved you! Thank you, Louise, for this devotion; but measures must be taken to place you beyond all insult, to secure you from every harm. Louise, a maid of honor in the court of a young princess in these times of freedom of manners and inconstant affections, — a maid of honor is placed as an object of attack without having any means of defence afforded her. This state of things is not seemly for you; you must be married in order to be respected."

"Married?"

"Yes. There is my hand, Louise; will you place your hand within it?"

"But your father?"

"My father leaves me perfectly free."

"Yet —"

"I understand your scruples, Louise; I will consult my father."

"Oh, M. Raoul, reflect, wait!"

"Wait! it is impossible; reflect, Louise, when you are concerned! it would be insulting to you. Give me your hand, dear Louise. I am my own master. My father will consent, I know. Give me your hand; do not keep me waiting thus! One word in answer, one word only; if not, I shall begin to think that in order to change you forever nothing more was needed than a single step in the palace, a single breath of favor, a smile from the queen, a single look from the king."

Raoul had no sooner pronounced this last word than La Vallière became as pale as death, no doubt from her fear at seeing the young man so roused. With a movement as rapid as thought, she placed both her hands in those of Raoul, and then fled without adding a syllable, disappeared without casting a look behind her. Raoul felt his whole frame tremble at the contact of her hand; he received the promise as a solemn assurance wrung by love from the timidity of innocence.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE CONSENT OF ATHOS.

Raoul had left the Palais-Royal full of ideas which admitted of no delay in their execution. He mounted his horse in the courtyard, and followed the road to Blois, while the marriage festivities of Monsieur and the princess of England were celebrated with great delight by the courtiers, but to the great despair of De Guiche and Buckingham. Raoul lost no time on the road, and in sixteen hours arrived at Blois. As he travelled along, he marshalled his most convincing arguments. Fever also is an argument that cannot be answered, and Raoul had an attack of fever.

Athos was in his study, making some additions to his memoirs, when Raoul entered, shown in by Grimaud. Keen-sighted and penetrating, a mere glance at his son told him that something extraordinary had befallen him.

"You seem to have come on some matter of great importance," said he to Raoul, after he had embraced him, and pointing to a seat.

"Yes, Monsieur," replied the young man; "and I entreat you to give me the same kind attention which has never yet been refused me."

"Speak, Raoul!"

"I present the case to you, Monsieur, free from all preface, for that would be unworthy of you. Mademoiselle de la Vallière is in Paris as one of Madame's maids of honor. I have pondered deeply on the matter. I love

Mademoiselle de la Vallière above everything; and it is not proper to leave her in a position where her reputation, her virtue even, may be exposed. It is my wish, therefore, to marry her, Monsieur, and I have come to solicit your consent to this marriage."

Athos had maintained, during this communication, absolute silence and reserve. Raoul, who had begun his speech with an assumption of self-possession, finished it by allowing manifest emotion to escape him at every word.

Athos fixed upon Bragelonne a searching look, overshadowed indeed by a slight sadness. "You have considered it well?" he inquired.

"Yes, Monsieur."

"I believe you have already been made acquainted with my views respecting this alliance?"

"Yes, Monsieur," replied Raoul, in a low tone of voice; "but you added that if I insisted — "

"You do insist, then?"

Bragelonne stammered out an almost unintelligible assent.

"Your passion," continued Athos, tranquilly, "must indeed be very great, since, notwithstanding my dislike to this union, you persist in desiring it."

Raoul passed his trembling hand across his forehead to remove the perspiration which had collected there.

Athos looked at him, and his heart was touched with pity for him. He then rose, and said: "It is no matter; my own personal feelings are of no consequence, since yours are concerned. You need my assistance; I am ready to give it. Tell me what you want."

"Your kind indulgence, first of all, Monsieur," said Raoul, taking hold of his hand.

"You have mistaken my feelings, Raoul; I have more

than mere indulgence for you in my heart," replied the count.

Raoul kissed, as devotedly as a lover could have done, the hand he held in his own.

"Come, come," said Athos, "I am quite ready, Raoul; what do you wish me to sign?"

"Oh, nothing, Monsieur, nothing! Only it would be very kind if you would take the trouble to write to the king, to whom I belong, and solicit his Majesty's permission for me to marry Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

"Well thought, Raoul! After or rather before myself, you have a master to consult, that master being the king; it is loyal in you to submit yourself voluntarily to this double ordeal. I will grant your request without delay, Raoul."

The count approached the window, and leaning out called to Grimaud, who showed his head from an arbor covered with jasmine, which he was occupied in trimming.

"My horses, Grimaud!" continued the count.

"Why this order, Monsieur?" inquired Raoul.

"We shall start in two hours."

"Whither?"

"For Paris."

"Paris, Monsieur! you go to Paris?"

"Is not the king at Paris?"

"Certainly."

"Well, ought we not to go there? Have you forgotten yourself?"

"Yet, Monsieur," said Raoul, almost alarmed by this kind condescension, "I do not ask you to put yourself to such inconvenience; and a letter merely —"

"You mistake my position, Raoul. It is not respectful that a simple gentleman such as I am should write to

his sovereign. I wish to speak, and I ought to speak, to his Majesty, and I will do so. We will go together, Raoul."

"You overpower me with your kindness, Monsieur."

"How do you think his Majesty is affected?"

"Towards me, Monsieur?"

"Yes."

"Excellently well disposed."

"Has he told you so?"

"With his own lips"

"On what occasion?"

"Upon the recommendation of M. d'Artagnan, I believe, and on account of an affair in the Place de Grève, when I had the honor to draw my sword in the king's service. I have reason to believe, then, that, vanity apart, I stand well with his Majesty."

"So much the better."

"But I entreat you, Monsieur," pursued Raoul, "not to maintain towards me this grave and serious manner. Do not make me regret having listened to a feeling stronger than anything else."

"That is the second time you have said so, Raoul; it was quite unnecessary. You require my formal consent, and you have it. We need talk no more on the subject, therefore. Come and see my new plantations, Raoul."

The young man knew very well that after the expression of his father's wish, no opportunity of discussion was left him. He bowed his head, and followed his father into the garden. Athos leisurely pointed out to him the grafts, the cuttings, and the avenues he was planting. This perfect repose of manner disconcerted Raoul more and more; the love with which his own heart was filled seemed so great that the whole world could hardly contain it. How, then, could his father's heart remain void,

and closed to its influence? Bragelonne thereupon, collecting all his courage, suddenly exclaimed: "It is impossible, Monsieur, that you can have any reason to reject Mademoiselle de la Vallière; she is so good, so sweet, so pure, that your mind, so perfect in its penetration, ought to appreciate her worth. In Heaven's name, does any secret enmity or hereditary dislike exist between you and her family?"

"Look, Raoul, at that beautiful lily-of-the-valley," said Athos; "observe how the shade and the damp situation suit it, particularly the shadow which that sycamore-tree casts over it, so that the warmth, and not the blazing heat of the sun, filters through its drooping leaves."

Raoul stopped, bit his lips, and then, with the blood mantling in his face, said courageously: "One word of explanation, I beg, Monsieur. You cannot forget that your son is a man."

"In that case," replied Athos, drawing himself up with sternness, "prove to me that you are a man, for you do not show yourself to be a son. I begged you to wait the opportunity of forming an illustrious alliance. I should have obtained a wife for you from the first ranks of the rich nobility. I wished you to be distinguished by the splendor which glory and fortune confer, for nobility of descent you have already."

"Monsieur," exclaimed Raoul, carried away by a first impulse, "I was reproached the other day for not knowing who my mother was."

Athos turned pale; then knitting his brows like the greatest of the heathen deities, "I am waiting to learn the reply you made, Monsieur," he demanded, in an imperious manner.

"Forgive me! oh, forgive me!" murmured the young man, sinking at once from the lofty tone he had assumed.

"What was your reply, Monsieur?" demanded the count, stamping his foot upon the ground.

"Monsieur, my sword was in my hand immediately; he who insulted me placed himself on guard; I struck his sword over a palisade, and threw him after it."

"And why did n't you kill him?"

"The king forbids duelling, Monsieur, and at that moment I was an ambassador of the king."

"Very well," said Athos; "but this furnishes a greater reason why I should see his Majesty."

"What do you intend to ask him, Monsieur?"

"For authority to draw my sword against the man who has inflicted this injury upon me."

"Monsieur, if I did not act as I ought to have done, I beg you to forgive me."

"Did I reproach you, Raoul?"

"Still, the permission you are going to ask from the king?"

"I will implore his Majesty to sign your marriage-contract, but on one condition."

"Are conditions necessary with me, Monsieur? Command, and you shall be obeyed."

"On one condition," continued Athos: "that you tell me the name of the man who has spoken thus of — your mother."

"But, Monsieur, what need is there that you should know his name? The offence was directed against myself; and, the permission once obtained from his Majesty, to revenge it is my affair."

"His name, Monsieur?"

"I will not allow you to expose yourself."

"Do you take me for a Don Diego? His name, I say!"

"You insist upon it?"

"I demand it."

"The Vicomte de Wardes."

"Very well," said Athos, tranquilly; "I know him. But our horses are ready, I see; and instead of delaying our departure for a couple of hours, we will set off at once. Come, Monsieur!"

CHAPTER XLIII.

MONSIEUR BECOMES JEALOUS OF THE DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM.

While the Comte de la Fère was proceeding on his way to Paris, accompanied by Raoul, the Palais-Royal was the theatre of a scene which Molière would have called excellent comedy. Four days had elapsed since Monsieur's marriage. Having breakfasted very hurriedly, he passed into his antechamber, frowning and out of temper. The repast had not been over-agreeable. Madame had had breakfast served in her own apartment, and Monsieur had breakfasted almost alone; the Chevalier de Lorraine and Manicamp were the only other persons present at the meal, which had lasted three quarters of an hour without a single syllable having been uttered. Manicamp, who was less intimate with his royal Highness than the Chevalier de Lorraine, vainly endeavored to detect, from the expression of the prince's face, what had made him so ill-humored. The Chevalier de Lorraine, who had no occasion to speculate about anything, inasmuch as he knew all, ate his breakfast with that extraordinary appetite which the troubles of others afforded him, and enjoyed at the same time both the ill-humor of Monsieur and the perplexity of Manicamp. He seemed delighted, while he went on eating, to detain at table the prince, who was very impatient to move. Monsieur at times repented the ascendency which he had permitted the Chevalier de Lorraine to acquire over him, and which exempted the latter from any observance of etiquette towards him. Monsieur was now in one of those moods; but he dreaded

as much as he liked the chevalier, and contented himself with raging inwardly. Every now and then Monsieur raised his eyes to the ceiling, then lowered them towards the slices of *pâté* which the chevalier was attacking; and finally, not venturing to betray his anger, he began a pantomime which Harlequin might have admired. At last, however, Monsieur could control himself no longer, and at the dessert, rising from the table in excessive wrath, as we have related, he left the Chevalier de Lorraine to finish his breakfast as he pleased. Seeing Monsieur rise from the table, Manicamp rose quickly, napkin in hand. Monsieur ran, rather than walked, towards the antechamber, and finding an usher there, gave him some directions in a low voice. Then, turning back again, but avoiding the breakfast-room, he passed through several rooms, with the intention of seeking the queen-mother in her oratory, where she usually remained.

It was about ten o'clock in the morning. Anne of Austria was engaged in writing as Monsieur entered. The queen-mother was extremely attached to her son, for he was handsome in person and amiable in disposition. He was in fact more affectionate, and, so to speak, more effeminate than the king. He pleased his mother by those trifling sympathetic attentions which all women like to receive. Anne of Austria, who would have rejoiced to have had a daughter, found in this her favorite son the attentions, solicitude, and caressing manners of a child of twelve. All the time he passed with his mother he employed in admiring her beautiful arms, in giving his opinion upon her cosmetics and receipts for compounding essences, in which she was very particular; and then, too, he kissed her hands and eyes in the most endearing and childlike manner, and had always some sweetmeats to offer her, or some new style of dress to recommend.

Anne of Austria loved the king, or rather the regal power in her eldest son: Louis XIV. represented legitimacy by divine right. With the king her character was that of the queen-mother; with Philip she was simply the mother. The latter knew that of all places of refuge a mother's heart is the most compassionate and the surest. When quite a child, he had always fled there for refuge when storms arose between him and his brother; often, after having struck him, which constituted the crime of high treason on his part, after certain engagements with hands and nails in which the king and his rebellious subject indulged in their night-dresses upon a disputed bed, having their servant Laporte as umpire, — Philip, the conqueror, but terrified at his victory, used to flee to his mother to obtain reinforcements from her, or at least the assurance of a forgiveness, which Louis XIV. granted with difficulty and after an interval. Anne, from this habit of peaceful intervention, had succeeded in arranging the differences between her sons, and in sharing at the same time all their secrets. The king, somewhat jealous of that maternal solicitude which was bestowed particularly upon his brother, felt disposed to show towards his mother more submission and attachment than his character really possessed.

Anne of Austria had adopted this line of conduct especially towards the young queen. In this manner she ruled with almost despotic sway over the royal household; and she was already preparing all her batteries to rule with the same absolute authority over the household of her second son. Anne experienced almost a feeling of pride whenever she saw any one enter her apartments with woe-begone looks, pale cheeks, or red eyes, comprehending that assistance was required either by the weakest or by the most rebellious. She was

writing, we have said, when Monsieur entered her oratory, not with red eyes or pale cheeks, but restless, out of temper, and annoyed. With an absent air he kissed his mother's arms, and sat down before receiving her permission to do so. Considering the strict rules of etiquette established at the court of Anne of Austria, this forgetfulness of customary respect was a sign of preoccupation, especially on Philip's part, who of his own accord observed towards her a respect of a somewhat exaggerated character. If, therefore, he so notoriously failed with regard to such principles of respect, there must surely be a serious cause for it.

"What is the matter, Philip?" inquired Anne of Austria, turning towards her son.

"A great many things," murmured the prince, dolefully.

"You look like a man who has a great deal to do," said the queen, laying down her pen. Philip frowned, but did not reply. "Among the various subjects which occupy your mind," said Anne of Austria, "there must surely be one which occupies it more than others."

"Yes, Madame; one indeed has occupied me more than any other."

"Well, what is it? I am listening."

Philip opened his mouth as if to give vent to all the troubles which were passing in his mind, and which seemed only waiting for a point of issue to burst forth. But he suddenly became silent, and a sigh alone expressed all that his heart contained.

"Come, Philip, show a little firmness," said the queen-mother. "When one has to complain of anything, it is generally an individual who is the cause of it. Am I not right?"

"I do not say no, Madame."

"Whom do you wish to speak about? Come, take courage!"

"In fact, Madame, what I may have to say must be kept a perfect secret; for when a lady is in the case —"

"Ah! you wish to speak of Madame, then?" inquired the queen-mother, with a feeling of the liveliest curiosity.

"Yes."

"Well, then, if it is Madame you wish to speak of, my son, do not hesitate. I am your mother, and she is no more than a stranger to me. Yet, as she is my daughter-in-law, be assured that I shall be interested, even were it for your own sake alone, in hearing all that you may have to say about her."

"Pray tell me, Madame, in your turn, whether you have not noticed something?"

"Something, Philip? Your words have an alarming vagueness. What do you mean by something?"

"Madame is pretty, certainly."

"No doubt of it."

"Yet not altogether beautiful."

"No; but as she matures she may still become very strikingly beautiful. You must have remarked the change which a few years have already made in her. Her beauty will improve more and more; she is now only sixteen years of age. At fifteen I was myself very thin; but even as she is at present, Madame is very pretty."

"And consequently others may have remarked it."

"Undoubtedly; for a woman of ordinary rank is observed, and with still greater reason a princess."

"She has been well brought up, I suppose, Madame?"

"Madame Henrietta, her mother, is a woman somewhat cold in her manner, slightly pretentious, but full of noble thoughts. The education of the young princess may have been neglected, but her principles I believe to be good. Such, at least, was the opinion I formed of her when she resided in France; but she afterwards returned

to England, and I am ignorant of what may have occurred there."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply that there are some heads, naturally giddy, which are easily turned by prosperity."

"That is the very word, Madame. I think the princess rather giddy."

"We must not exaggerate, Philip. She is clever and witty, and has a certain amount of coquetry very natural in a young woman; but this defect is, in persons of high rank and position, a great advantage at a court. A princess who is tinged with coquetry usually forms a brilliant court around her; her smile stimulates luxury, and arouses wit and courage even; the nobles, too, fight better for a prince whose wife is beautiful."

"Thank you extremely, Madame," said Philip, with some temper; "you really have drawn some very alarming pictures for me, my mother."

"In what respect?" asked the queen, with pretended simplicity.

"You know, Madame," said Philip, dolefully, "whether I had or had not a very great dislike to getting married."

"Now, indeed, you alarm me; you have some serious cause of complaint against Madame?"

"I do not precisely say it is serious."

"In that case, then, throw aside your present mournful looks. If you show yourself in your palace in your present state, people will take you for a very unhappy husband."

"The fact is," replied Philip, "I am not altogether satisfied as a husband, and I shall be glad to have others know it."

"For shame, Philip!"

"Upon my word, Madame, I will tell you frankly that I do not understand the life I am required to lead."

"Explain yourself."

"My wife does not seem to belong to me; she is always leaving me for one reason or another. In the mornings there are visits, correspondence, and toilets; in the evenings, balls and concerts."

"You are jealous, Philip."

"I! Heaven forbid! Let others act the part of a jealous husband, — not I. But I am annoyed."

"Philip, all those things you reproach your wife with are perfectly innocent; and so long as you have nothing of greater importance — "

"Yet listen! Without being very blamable, a woman can excite a good deal of uneasiness; certain visitors may be received, certain preferences shown, which expose young women to remark, and which are enough to drive out of their senses even those husbands who are least disposed to be jealous."

"Ah! now we are coming to the real point at last, and not without some difficulty too. You speak of frequent visits and certain preferences, — very good; for the last hour we have been beating about the bush, and at last you have broached the real question."

"Well, yes — "

"This is more serious than I thought. Is it possible, then, that Madame can have given you grounds for these complaints against her?"

"Precisely so."

"What! your wife, married only four days ago, prefer some other person to yourself? Take care, Philip! You exaggerate your grievances; wishing to prove, proves nothing."

The prince, bewildered by his mother's serious manner, wished to reply, but could only stammer out some unintelligible words.

"You draw back, then?" said Anne of Austria. "I prefer that, as it is an acknowledgment of your mistake."

"No," exclaimed Philip, "I do not draw back, and I will prove all that I asserted. I spoke of preferences and of visits, did I not? Well, listen!"

Anne of Austria prepared to listen with that love of gossip which the best woman living and the best mother, were she a queen even, always finds in being mixed up with the petty squabbles of a household.

"Well," said Philip, "tell me one thing."

"What is that?"

"Why does my wife retain an English court about her?" and Philip crossed his arms and looked his mother steadily in the face, as if he were convinced that she could not answer the question.

"For a very simple reason," returned Anne of Austria; "because the English are her countrymen, because they have expended large sums in order to accompany her to France, and because it would be hardly polite — not good policy, certainly — to dismiss abruptly those members of the English nobility who have not shrunk from any devotion or from any sacrifice."

"A wonderful sacrifice, indeed, my mother, to desert a wretched country to come to a beautiful one, where a greater effect can be produced for one crown than can be procured elsewhere for four! Extraordinary devotion, really, to travel a hundred leagues in company with a woman one is in love with!"

"In love, Philip! Think what you are saying! Who is in love with Madame?"

"The handsome Duke of Buckingham. Perhaps you will defend him as well?"

Anne of Austria blushed and smiled at the same time. The name of the Duke of Buckingham recalled certain

recollections to her of a tender and melancholy nature. "The Duke of Buckingham!" she murmured.

"Yes; one of those feather-bed soldiers, as my grandfather Henry IV. called them."

"The Buckinghams are loyal and brave," said Anne of Austria, courageously.

"This is too bad! my own mother takes the part of my wife's lover against me!" exclaimed Philip, incensed to such an extent that his weak organization was affected almost to tears.

"Philip, my son," exclaimed Anne of Austria, "such an expression is unworthy of you! Your wife has no lover; and had she one, it would not be the Duke of Buckingham. The members of that family, I repeat, are loyal and discreet, and the laws of hospitality are sacred with them."

"Eh, Madame!" cried Philip; "the Duke of Buckingham is an Englishman, and do the English so very religiously respect what belongs to the princes of France?"

Anne blushed to her temples a second time, and turned aside under the pretext of taking her pen from her desk again, but really to conceal her blushes from the eyes of her son. "Really, Philip," she said, "you seem to discover expressions for the purpose of embarrassing me, and your anger blinds you while it alarms me. Reflect a little!"

"There is no need of reflection, Madame, for I see with my own eyes."

"Well, and what do you see?"

"I see that the Duke of Buckingham never leaves my wife. He presumes to make presents to her, and she dares to accept them. Yesterday she spoke of *sachets à la violette;* well, our French perfumers, — you know very well, Madame, for you have over and over again asked for it without success, — our French perfumers, I say, have

never been able to procure this scent. The duke, however, wore about him a *sachet à la violette;* and I am sure that the one my wife has, came from him."

"Indeed, Monsieur," said Anne of Austria, "you build your pyramids upon needle-points. Be careful! What harm, I ask you, can there be in a man giving to his countrywoman a receipt for a new essence? These strange ideas, I protest, painfully recall to me your father, who so frequently and so unjustly made me suffer."

"The Duke of Buckingham's father was probably more reserved and more respectful than his son," said Philip, thoughtlessly, not perceiving how rudely he touched his mother's heart.

The queen turned pale, and pressed her hand nervously upon her bosom; but recovering herself immediately, she said, "You came here with a purpose of some kind, I suppose?"

"Certainly."

"What was it?"

"I came, Madame, intending to complain energetically, and to inform you that I will not submit to anything from the Duke of Buckingham."

"What do you intend to do, then?"

"I shall complain to the king."

"And what do you expect the king to reply?"

"Very well, then," said Monsieur, with an expression of stern determination on his countenance, which offered a singular contrast to its usual gentleness; "very well, I will right myself!"

"What do you call righting yourself?" inquired Anne of Austria, somewhat alarmed.

"I will have the Duke of Buckingham leave the princess, I will have him quit France, and I will see that my wishes are intimated to him."

"You will intimate nothing of the kind, Philip," said the queen; "for if you act in that manner, and violate hospitality to that extent, I will invoke the severity of the king against you."

"Do you threaten me, Madame?" exclaimed Philip, in tears; "do you threaten me in the midst of my complaints?"

"I do not threaten you; I do but place an obstacle in the path of your hasty anger. I maintain that to adopt towards the Duke of Buckingham, or any other Englishman, any rigorous measure, — to take even a discourteous step towards him, would be to hurry France and England into the saddest variances. Can it be possible that a prince of the blood, the brother of the King of France, does not know how to hide an injury, even did it exist in reality, where political necessity requires it?" Philip made a movement. "Besides," continued the queen, "the injury is neither actual nor possible, and we are considering merely a matter of absurd jealousy."

"Madame, I know what I know."

"Whatever you may know, I exhort you to be patient."

"I am not patient by disposition, Madame."

The queen rose, full of severity, and with an icy, ceremonious manner. "Then explain what you really require, Monsieur," said she.

"I do not require anything, Madame; I simply express what I desire. If the Duke of Buckingham does not of his own accord keep away from my apartments, I shall forbid him an entrance."

"That is a question we will refer to the king," said Anne of Austria, her heart swelling as she spoke, and her voice trembling with emotion.

"But, Madame," exclaimed Philip, striking his hands together, "act as my mother and not as the queen, since

I speak to you as a son; it is simply a matter of a few minutes' conversation between the duke and myself."

"It is that conversation which I forbid, Monsieur," said the queen, resuming her authority, "because it is unworthy of you."

"Be it so: I shall not appear in the matter, but I shall intimate my will to Madame."

"Oh," said Anne of Austria, with a melancholy arising from her recollections, "never tyrannize over a wife, my son, — never behave too imperiously towards yours! A woman conquered is not always convinced."

"What is to be done, then? I will consult my friends about it."

"Yes, your hypocritical advisers, — the Chevalier de Lorraine, your De Wardes. Intrust the conduct of this affair to me, Philip. You wish the Duke of Buckingham to leave, do you not?"

"As soon as possible, Madame."

"Send the duke to me, then. Smile upon him. Say nothing to your wife, the king, to any one. Follow no advice but mine. Alas! I too well know what a household is which is troubled by advisers."

"You shall be obeyed, Madame."

"And you will be satisfied at the result, Philip. Send the duke to me."

"That will not be difficult."

"Where do you suppose him to be?"

"*Pardieu!* at my wife's door, whose *levée* he is probably awaiting. That is beyond doubt."

"Very well," said Anne of Austria, calmly. "Be good enough to tell the duke that I beg him to come and see me."

Philip kissed his mother's hand, and set off to find the Duke of Buckingham.

CHAPTER XLIV.

FOREVER !

The Duke of Buckingham, obedient to the queen-mother's invitation, presented himself in her apartments half an hour after the departure of the Duc d'Orléans. When his name was announced by the gentleman-usher in attendance, the queen, who was sitting with her elbows resting on a table and her head buried in her hands, rose, and smilingly received the graceful and respectful salutation which the duke addressed to her. Anne of Austria was still beautiful. It is well known that at her then somewhat advanced age, her long auburn hair, perfectly formed hands, and bright ruby lips were still the admiration of all who saw her. On the present occasion, abandoned entirely to a remembrance which evoked all the past in her heart, she was as beautiful as in the days of her youth, when her palace was open to the visits of the Duke of Buckingham's father, then a young and impassioned man, as well as an unfortunate one, who lived but for her alone, and who died with her name upon his lips. Anne of Austria fixed upon Buckingham a look so tender that it expressed at the same time the kindness of a maternal affection and a certain something like the coquetry of a woman who loves.

"Your Majesty," said Buckingham, respectfully, "desired to speak to me."

"Yes, Duke," said the queen, in English; "will you be good enough to sit down?"

The favor which Anne of Austria thus extended to the young man, and the welcome sound of the language of a country from which the duke had been estranged since his stay in France, deeply affected him. He immediately conjectured that the queen had a request to make of him.

After having abandoned the first few moments to the irrepressible emotion she experienced, the queen resumed the smiling air with which she had received him. "What do you think of France, Monsieur?" she said, in French.

"It is a lovely country, Madame," replied the duke.

"Have you ever seen it before?"

"Once only, Madame."

"But, like all true Englishmen, you prefer England?"

"I prefer my own native land to France," replied the duke; "but if your Majesty were to ask me which of the two cities, London or Paris, I should prefer as a residence, I should reply, Paris."

Anne of Austria observed the ardent tone in which these words were pronounced. "I am told, my Lord, that you have rich possessions in your own country, and that you live in a splendid and time-honored palace."

"It was my father's residence," replied Buckingham, casting down his eyes.

"Doubtless it possesses great advantages and precious remembrances," replied the queen, alluding, in spite of herself, to recollections which were of a very enduring character.

"In fact," said the duke, yielding to the melancholy influence of this opening conversation, "sensitive persons live as much in the past or in the future as in the present."

"That is very true," said the queen, in a low voice. "It follows, then, my Lord," she added, "that you, who are a man of feeling, will soon quit France in order to shut yourself up with your wealth and your relics of the past."

Buckingham raised his head and said, "I think not, Madame."

"What do you mean?"

"On the contrary, I think of leaving England in order to take up my residence in France."

It was now Anne of Austria's turn to exhibit surprise. "Why?" she said. "Are you not in favor with the new king?"

"Perfectly so, Madame, for his Majesty's kindness to me is unbounded."

"It cannot be because your fortune has diminished," said the queen, "for it is said to be considerable."

"My fortune, Madame, has never been more thriving."

"There is some secret cause, then?"

"No, Madame," said Buckingham, eagerly, "there is nothing secret in my reason for this determination. I like living in France; I like a court so distinguished by its refinement and courtesy; I like those amusements, a trifle serious, which are not the amusements of my own country, and which are met with in France."

Anne of Austria smiled shrewdly. "Amusements of a serious nature?" she said. "Has your Grace well considered their seriousness?" The duke hesitated. "There is no amusement so serious," continued the queen, "as should prevent a man of your rank —"

"Your Majesty seems to insist greatly upon that point," interrupted the duke.

"Do you think so, my Lord?"

"If your Majesty will forgive me for saying so, it is the second time you have vaunted the attractions of England at the expense of the charm of living in France."

Anne of Austria approached the young man, and placing her beautiful hand upon his shoulder, which trembled at the touch, said: "Believe me, Monsieur, nothing can

equal the charm of a residence in one's own native country. I have very frequently had occasion to long for Spain. I have lived long, my Lord, very long for a woman; and I confess to you that not a year has passed in which I have not longed for Spain."

"Not one year, Madame?" said the young duke, coldly. "Not one of those years when you reigned queen of beauty, — as you still are, indeed?"

"A truce to flattery, Duke, for I am old enough to be your mother." She emphasized these latter words in a manner and with a gentleness which penetrated Buckingham's heart. "Yes," she said, "I am old enough to be your mother; and for this reason I will give you a word of advice."

"That advice being that I should return to London?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, my Lord."

The duke clasped his hands with a terrified gesture, which could not fail of its effect upon the queen, already disposed to softer feelings by the tenderness of her own recollections.

"It must be so," added the queen.

"What!" he again exclaimed, "am I seriously told that I *must* leave, that I must exile myself, that I am to flee at once?"

"Exile yourself, did you say? Why, my Lord, one would fancy that France was your native country."

"Madame, the country of those who love is the country of those whom they love."

"Not another word, my Lord; you forget whom you are addressing."

Buckingham threw himself on his knees. "Madame, you are the source of intelligence, of goodness, and of compassion; you are not only the first person in this kingdom

by your rank, but the first person in the world on account of your angelic attributes. I have said nothing, Madame. Have I, indeed, said anything to which you should reply in words so cruel? Can I have betrayed myself?"

"You have betrayed yourself," said the queen, in a low voice.

"I have said nothing, — I know nothing."

"You forget you have spoken and thought in the presence of a woman; and besides — "

"Besides," interrupted the duke, eagerly, "no one knows that you are listening to me."

"On the contrary, it is known, Duke, that you have the defects and the virtues of youth."

"I have been betrayed or denounced, then?"

"By whom?"

"By those who at Havre had, with infernal perspicacity, read my heart like an open book."

"I do not know whom you mean."

"M. de Bragelonne, for instance."

"I know the name without being acquainted with the person to whom it belongs. No, M. de Bragelonne has said nothing."

"Who can it be, then? If any one, Madame, had had the boldness to notice in me that which I do not myself wish to behold — "

"What would you do, Duke?"

"There are secrets which kill those who discover them."

"He, then, who has discovered your secret, madman that you are, still lives; and, what is more, you will not slay him, for he is armed on all sides, — he is a husband, a jealous man, — he is the second gentleman in France, — he is my son, the Duc d'Orléans."

The duke turned pale as death. "How cruel you are, Madame!" said he.

"You see, Buckingham," said Anne of Austria, sadly, "how you pass from one extreme to another, and fight with shadows, when it would seem so easy to remain at peace with yourself."

"If we fight, Madame, we die on the field of battle," replied the young man gently, abandoning himself to the most gloomy depression.

Anne ran towards him and took him by the hand. "Villiers," she said, in English, with a vehemence of tone which nothing could resist, "what is it you ask? Do you ask a mother to sacrifice her son, — a queen to consent to the dishonor of her house? Child that you are, do not think of it. What! in order to spare your tears, am I to commit these two crimes, Villiers? You speak of the dead: the dead, at least, were respectful and submissive; they resigned themselves to an order of exile; they carried their despair away with them in their hearts, like a priceless possession, because the despair was caused by the woman they loved, and because death, thus disguised, was like a gift or a favor conferred upon them."

Buckingham rose, his features distorted, and his hands pressed against his heart. "You are right, Madame," he said; "but those of whom you speak had received their order of exile from the lips of the one whom they loved; they were not driven away, — they were entreated to leave, and were not laughed at."

"No," murmured Anne of Austria, "they were not forgotten! But who says that you are driven away, or that you are exiled? Who says that your devotion will not be remembered? I do not speak on any one's behalf but my own, when I tell you to leave. Do me this kindness, — grant me this favor; let me for this, also, be indebted to one of your name."

"It is for your sake, then, Madame?"

"For mine alone."

"There will be no one left behind me who will venture to mock,—no prince, even, who shall say, 'I required it'?"

"Listen to me, Duke!" and hereupon the august features of the aged queen assumed a solemn expression. "I swear to you that no one commands in this matter but myself. I swear to you that not only shall no one either laugh or boast in any way, but no one even shall fail in the respect due to your rank. Rely upon me, Duke, as I rely upon you."

"You do not explain yourself, Madame; my heart is full of bitterness, and I am in utter despair; no consolation, however gentle and affectionate it may be, can afford me relief."

"Do you remember your mother, Duke?" replied the queen, with a winning smile.

"Very slightly, Madame; yet I remember how that noble lady used to cover me with her caresses and her tears whenever I wept."

"Villiers," murmured the queen, passing her arm round the young man's neck, "look upon me as your mother, and believe that no one shall ever make my son weep."

"I thank you, Madame," said the young man, affected and almost suffocated by his emotion; "I feel that there is indeed still room in my heart for a gentler and nobler sentiment than love."

The queen-mother gazed at him and pressed his hand. "Go!" she said.

"When must I leave? Command me."

"Any time that may suit you, my Lord," resumed the queen; "you will choose your own day of departure. Instead, however, of setting off to-day, as you would doubtless wish to do, or to-morrow, as others may have

expected, leave the day after to-morrow, in the evening; but announce to-day that it is your wish to leave."

"My wish?" murmured the young man.

"Yes, Duke."

"And — shall I never return to France?"

Anne of Austria reflected for a moment, seemingly absorbed in sad and serious thought. "It would be a consolation for me," she said, "if you were to return on the day when I shall be carried to my final resting-place at St. Denis, beside the king my husband."

"Madame, you are goodness itself. The tide of prosperity is setting in upon you; your cup brims over with happiness, and many long years are yet before you."

"In that case you will not come for some time, then," said the queen, endeavoring to smile.

"I shall not return," said Buckingham, sadly, "young as I am. Death, Madame, does not reckon by years, — it is impartial; some die young, others live on to old age."

"Away with gloomy ideas, Duke! Let me comfort you. Return in two years. I read in your charming face that the very ideas which sadden you so much now will have disappeared before six months shall have passed, and will be all dead and forgotten in the period of absence I have assigned to you."

"I think you judged me better a little while since, Madame," replied the young man, "when you said that time is powerless against members of the family of Buckingham."

"Silence!" said the queen, kissing the duke upon the forehead with an affection which she could not restrain. "Go, go! spare me, and forget yourself no longer. I am the queen. You are the subject of the King of England; King Charles awaits your return. Adieu, Villiers, — farewell!"

"Forever!" replied the young man; and he fled, endeavoring to master his emotion.

Anne leaned her head upon her hands, and then, looking at herself in the glass, murmured, "It has been truly said that a woman is always young, and that the age of twenty years always lies concealed in some secret corner of the heart."

CHAPTER XLV.

KING LOUIS XIV. DOES NOT THINK MADEMOISELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE EITHER RICH ENOUGH OR PRETTY ENOUGH FOR A GENTLEMAN OF THE RANK OF THE VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE.

Raoul and the Comte de la Fère reached Paris the evening of the same day on which Buckingham had had the conversation with the queen-mother. The count had scarcely arrived, when, through Raoul, he solicited an audience of the king. His Majesty had passed a portion of the day in looking over, with Madame and the ladies of the court, various goods of Lyons manufacture of which he had made his sister-in-law a present. A court dinner had succeeded, then cards; and afterwards, according to his usual custom, the king, leaving the card-tables at eight o'clock, had passed into his cabinet in order to work with M. Colbert and M. Fouquet.

Raoul was in the antechamber when the two ministers went out, and the king, perceiving him through the half-closed door, said, "What does M. de Bragelonne want?"

The young man approached. "An audience, Sire," he replied, "for the Comte de la Fère, who has just arrived from Blois, and is most anxious to have an interview with your Majesty."

"I have an hour to spare between cards and my supper," said the king. "Is the Comte de la Fère ready?"

"He is below, and awaits your Majesty's commands."

"Let him come at once," said the king; and five minutes afterwards Athos entered the presence of Louis XIV. He was received by the king with that gracious kindness of manner which Louis, with a tact beyond his years, reserved for the purpose of gaining those men who were not to be conquered by ordinary favors. "Let me hope, Count," said the king, "that you have come to ask me for something."

"I will not conceal from your Majesty," replied the count, "that I have indeed come for that purpose."

"That is well, then," said the king, joyously.

"It is not for myself, Sire."

"So much the worse; but at least I will do for your *protégé* what you refuse to permit me to do for you."

"Your Majesty encourages me. I have come to speak on behalf of the Vicomte de Bragelonne."

"It is the same as if you spoke on your own behalf, Count."

"Not altogether so, Sire. That which I am desirous of obtaining from your Majesty I cannot obtain for myself. The viscount thinks of marrying."

"He is still very young; but that does not matter. He is an eminently distinguished man. I will choose a wife for him."

"He has already chosen one, Sire, and only awaits your Majesty's consent."

"It is only a question, then, of signing the marriage contract?" Athos bowed. "Has he chosen a wife whose fortune and position accord with your own views?"

Athos hesitated for a moment. "His betrothed is of good birth, but has no fortune."

"That is a misfortune which we can remedy."

"You overwhelm me with gratitude, Sire; but your Majesty will permit me to offer a remark?"

"Do so, Count."

"Your Majesty seems to intimate an intention of giving a marriage portion to this young girl?"

"Certainly."

"I should regret, Sire, if the application I make your Majesty should have that result."

"No false delicacy, Count; what is the bride's name?"

"Mademoiselle la Baume le Blanc de la Vallière," said Athos, coldly.

"Ah!" said the king, searching his memory, "I know that name; there was a Marquis de la Vallière."

"Yes, Sire, it is his daughter."

"But he died, and his widow was married again to M. de Saint-Remy, I think, steward of the dowager Madame's household."

"Your Majesty is correctly informed."

"More than that, the young lady has lately become one of the princess's maids of honor."

"Your Majesty is better acquainted with her history than I am."

The king again reflected, and glancing at the count's anxious countenance, said: "The young lady does not seem to me to be very pretty, Count."

"I am not quite sure," replied Athos.

"I have seen her, but she did not strike me as being so."

"She seems to be a sweet and modest girl, but has little beauty, Sire."

"Beautiful fair hair, however?"

"I think so."

"And quite beautiful blue eyes?"

"Yes, Sire."

"With regard to beauty, then, the match is but an ordinary one. Now for the money side of the question."

"From fifteen to twenty thousand livres' dowry at the

very outside, Sire. But the lovers are disinterested enough ; for myself, I care little for money."

"For superfluity, you mean ; but a needful amount is of importance. With fifteen thousand livres, without landed property, a woman cannot live at court. We will make up the deficiency ; I will do it for Bragelonne."

The king again noticed the coldness with which Athos received his remark.

"Let us pass from the question of money to that of rank," said Louis XIV. "The daughter of the Marquis de la Vallière, that is well enough ; but there is that excellent Saint-Remy, who somewhat damages the family, — on the women's side, I know, but damaging all the same, — and you, Count, are rather particular, I believe, about your own family."

"Sire, I no longer hold to anything but my devotion to your Majesty."

The king again paused. "A moment, Count. You have surprised me in no little degree from the beginning of our conversation. You come to ask me to authorize a marriage, and you seem greatly disturbed in having to make the request. Nay, pardon me, Count, but I am rarely deceived, young as I am ; for while with some persons I place my friendship at the disposal of my understanding, with others I call my distrust to my aid, by which my discernment is increased. I repeat that you do not prefer your request as though you wished it success."

"Well, Sire, that is true."

"I do not understand you, then ; refuse."

"Nay, Sire : I love Bragelonne with my whole heart ; he is smitten with Mademoiselle de la Vallière, he weaves dreams of bliss for the future ; I am not one who is willing to destroy the illusions of youth. This marriage is

objectionable to me, but I implore your Majesty to consent to it forthwith, and thus make Raoul happy."

"Tell me, Count, is she in love with him?"

"If your Majesty requires me to speak candidly, I do not believe in Mademoiselle de la Vallière's affection. She is young, she is a child, she is intoxicated with joy; the delight of being at court, the honor of being in the service of Madame, counteract in her head whatever affection she may have in her heart. It is a marriage similar to many others which your Majesty has seen at court; but Bragelonne wishes it, and let it be so."

"And yet you do not resemble those easy-tempered fathers who make slaves of themselves for their children," said the king.

"Sire, I am determined enough against the viciously disposed, but not so against men of upright character. Raoul is suffering, and is in great distress of mind; his disposition, naturally light and cheerful, has become heavy and melancholy. I do not wish to deprive your Majesty of the services he may be able to render."

"I understand you," said the king; "and what is more, I understand your heart, too, Count."

"There is no occasion, therefore," replied the count, "to tell your Majesty that my object is to make these children, or rather Raoul, happy."

"And I too, as much as yourself, Count, wish to secure M. de Bragelonne's happiness."

"I only await your Majesty's signature. Raoul will have the honor of presenting himself before you to receive your consent."

"You are mistaken, Count," said the king, firmly; "I have just said that I desire to secure the viscount's happiness, and from the present moment, therefore, I oppose his marriage."

"But, Sire," exclaimed Athos, "your Majesty has promised!"

"Not so, Count; I did not promise you, for it is opposed to my own views."

"I appreciate all your Majesty's considerate and generous intentions in my behalf; but I take the liberty of recalling to you that I undertook to approach your Majesty as an ambassador."

"An ambassador, Count, frequently asks, but does not always obtain what he asks."

"But, Sire, it will be such a blow for Bragelonne."

"My hand shall deal the blow; I will speak to the viscount."

"Love, Sire, is overwhelming in its might."

"Love can be resisted, Count; I myself can assure you of that."

"When one has the soul of a king, — your soul, Sire."

"Do not make yourself uneasy upon the subject. I have certain views for Bragelonne. I do not say that he shall not marry Mademoiselle de la Vallière, but I do not wish him to marry so young. I do not wish him to marry her until she has acquired a fortune; and he, on his side, no less deserves my favor, such as I wish to confer upon him. In a word, Count, I wish them to wait."

"Yet once more, Sire."

"Monsieur the Count, you told me you came to request a favor."

"Assuredly, Sire."

"Grant me one, then, instead, — let us speak no longer upon this matter. It is probable that before long war may be declared; I require men about me who are unfettered. I should hesitate to send under fire a married man or a father of a family; I should hesitate, also, on Bragelonne's account, to endow with a fortune, without

some sound reason for it, a young girl, a perfect stranger; such an act would sow jealousy among my nobility."

Athos bowed, and remained silent.

"Is that all you had to ask me?" added Louis XIV.

"Absolutely all, Sire; and I take my leave of your Majesty. Is it, however, necessary that I should inform Raoul?"

"Spare yourself the trouble and annoyance. Tell the viscount that at my *levée* to-morrow morning I will speak to him. I shall expect you this evening, Count, to join my card-table."

"I am in travelling-costume, Sire."

"A day will come, I hope, when you will leave me no more. Before long, Count, the monarchy will be established in such a manner as to enable me to offer a worthy hospitality to all men of your merit."

"Provided, Sire, a monarch reigns truly great in the hearts of his subjects, the palace he inhabits matters little, since he is worshipped in a temple."

With these words Athos left the cabinet, and found Bragelonne, who awaited his return.

"Well, Monsieur?" said the young man.

"The king, Raoul, is well disposed towards us both; not, perhaps, in the sense you suppose, but he is kind, and generously disposed towards our house."

"You have bad news to communicate to me, Monsieur," said the young man, turning very pale.

"The king will himself inform you to-morrow morning that it is not bad news."

"The king has not signed, however?"

"The king wishes himself to settle the terms of the contract, Raoul, and he desires to make it so grand that he requires time for it. Throw the blame rather on your own impatience than on the king's good-will."

Raoul, in utter consternation, because he knew the count's frankness as well as his tact, remained plunged in a dull, heavy stupor.

"Will you not go with me to my lodgings?" said Athos.

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur; I will follow you," Raoul stammered out, following Athos down the staircase.

"Since I am here," said Athos, suddenly, "cannot I see M. d'Artagnan?"

"Shall I show you to his apartment?" said Bragelonne.

"Do so."

"It is on the other staircase, then."

They altered their course; but as they reached the landing of the grand gallery, Raoul perceived a servant in the Comte de Guiche's livery, who ran towards him as soon as he heard his voice.

"What is it?" said Raoul.

"This note, Monsieur. Monsieur the Count heard of your return, and wrote to you without delay. I have been seeking you for the last hour."

Raoul approached Athos as he unsealed the letter, saying, "With your permission, Monsieur."

"Certainly."

DEAR RAOUL, — I have an affair in hand which requires immediate attention. I know you have returned; come to me as soon as possible.

DE GUICHE.

Hardly had he finished reading it, when a servant in the livery of the Duke of Buckingham, turning out of the gallery, recognized Raoul, and approached him respectfully, saying, "From his Grace the duke."

"Well, Raoul, as I see you are already as busy as a general of an army, I will leave you, and will find M. d'Artagnan myself."

"You will excuse me, I trust," said Raoul.

"Yes, yes, I excuse you. Adieu, Raoul! You will find me at my apartments until to-morrow; during the day I may set out for Blois, unless I have orders to the contrary."

"I shall present my respects to you to-morrow, Monsieur."

When Athos had left, Raoul opened Buckingham's letter.

MONSIEUR DE BRAGELONNE, — You are, of all the Frenchmen I have known, the one with whom I am most pleased. I am about to put your friendship to the proof. I have received a certain message, written in very good French. As I am an Englishman, I am afraid of not comprehending it very clearly. The letter has a good name attached to it, and that is all I can tell you. Will you be obliging enough to come and see me, for I am told you have arrived from Blois?

Your devoted

VILLIERS, *Duke of Buckingham.*

"I am going now to see your master," said Raoul to De Guiche's servant as he dismissed him; "and I shall be with the Duke of Buckingham in an hour," he added, dismissing with these words the duke's messenger.

END OF VOL. II.

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Dumas
The Victomte de Bragelonne

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